

**For Reference**

---

**NOT TO BE TAKEN FROM THIS ROOM.**

Ex LIBRIS  
UNIVERSITATIS  
ALBERTAEENSIS













KIERKEGAARD'S CONCEPT OF DREAD

---

A Thesis

Presented to

The General Faculty Council

Committee on Bachelor of Divinity Degrees

University of Alberta

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements In Candidacy

for the Degree

Bachelor of Divinity

---

by

Werner Waitkus, B.A.

October 1968



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
ST. STEPHEN'S THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

We, the undersigned, hereby certify that we have read and recommended to the General Faculty Council for acceptance, a thesis entitled KIERKEGAARD'S CONCEPT OF DREAD, submitted by Werner Waitkus, B.A., in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Divinity.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. BIOGRAPHY. . . . .	8
Father and Son . . . . .	9
Regina Olsen . . . . .	17
The Corsair Incident . . . . .	19
Against Christendom. . . . .	24
III. TOWARD A NEW VIEW OF MAN . . . . .	29
A. The Attack on Reason . . . . .	31
A Logical System Is Possible . . . . .	35
An Existential System Is Possible. . . . .	38
B. Man Not "Res Cogitans" . . . . .	45
C. The Descriptive Method . . . . .	48
IV. DREAD. . . . .	51
A. What Then Is Man?. . . . .	51
B. How To Discuss Original Sin. . . . .	59
C. The Fall From Innocence. . . . .	62
D. The Snowballing Effect . . . . .	70
E. The Anatomy of Dread . . . . .	78
F. Summary. . . . .	84
V. HAS KIERKEGAARD EXAGGERATED THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DREAD? . . .	91
A. Goldstein on Anxiety . . . . .	92
B. Sullivan on Anxiety. . . . .	95
C. Fromm on Anxiety . . . . .	97





CHAPTER	PAGE
D. The Age of Anxiety . . . . .	104
VI. CONCLUSION . . . . .	112
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	118



## CHAPTER I

### I. INTRODUCTION

When Kierkegaard died on November 11, 1855, it seemed that his life's work had been in vain. Hegel-inspired idealism was still a powerful current, and although the master himself had been stood on his head already by Marx, the men of the nineteenth century with a few exceptions remained naively optimistic in their understanding of the world and themselves. Science was on her triumphant march and the world, blindly falling prey to the myth of progress, paid its respect to the new queen who promised to unlock all the mysteries of the universe. The church, anxious not to be left behind with its suffering Saviour, strove to become an integral part of culture, giving its blessing to crown and establishment while assuring all that they were Christians already. It is not difficult to understand why in such a period nobody wanted to listen to a man, who by his own admission had given himself the task of making things more difficult.<sup>1</sup>

Like the prophets of Israel Kierkegaard saw further than most of his contemporaries and realized that all was not well with man and his civilization. He was convinced, together with Nietzsche, that the gravest question before man was that of Christianity, which for almost two thousand years had influenced all spheres of life but was now on the point of losing its power. Even though they were driven

---

<sup>1</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, pp. 165 ff.



to opposite positions in regard to it, both thinkers realized that the consequences of such a collapse of the spiritual center would be felt in all spheres of life, shaking the foundations of civilization. While Nietzsche begins by stating as a matter of fact the death of God and then devotes himself to the question of how life is to go on, Kierkegaard is determined to face the question of whether Christianity can still be lived in a time when man has unleashed forces which are bound to bring in their wake a far-reaching dehumanization and a "levelling of all values",<sup>2</sup> or whether a nominally Christian civilization must confess spiritual bankruptcy.

Being so far ahead of his time, Kierkegaard's passionate examination of this question went largely unnoticed. But the violent transformations and upheavals which were already inherent in the golden age of the nineteenth century forced themselves upon people. With breath-taking rapidity mankind moved from its most naively enthusiastic era through two startling wars into the opaqueness of the present period where not only the very survival of humanity has become questionable but where in the spreading unrest and disillusionment it becomes more and more evident that man has gone wrong. Scheler wrote in the last century, and it takes ingenious efforts today to avoid his insight, that modern man has become a problem to himself.

In that climate, about hundred years after his death, Kierkegaard was discovered as he had expected. His way of thinking which thrusts its

---

<sup>2</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, The Present Age, pp. 51 ff.





roots into the very depths of the human heart spoke to the present generation.

Although his work initiated a whole movement in philosophy and is evident in thinkers as far apart as Sartre and Marcel or Heidegger and Jaspers, it needs to be underlined that the significance of his work is bound up with Christianity and that he is primarily a religious writer. He himself summarizes his work in these words:

What does all this come to, when the reader puts together the points dwelt upon in the foregoing paragraphs? It means that this is a literary work in which the whole thought is the task of becoming a Christian.<sup>3</sup>

His diagnosis of Christendom, as he knew it, was that it suffered from insufficient appropriation or assimilation of the revealed truth. Thus he could say, "On the whole, the doctrine as it is presented is quite correct. I have therefore no quarrel with this. My contention is that something should be made of it."<sup>4</sup> He rightly foresaw that the Hegel-inspired ideologies of the nineteenth century combined with the advance of the sciences would initiate a neglect of the individual in his concrete existence. They would come to treat man as a cog in a grandiose scheme of world history and force him to breathe the thin air of "scientific philosophy" while living on the tiny island of "scientifically verifiable data". But Kierkegaard is deeply convinced that the individual person is the center of human existence, that the individual is the bearer of the

---

<sup>3</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, The Point of View, p. 42.

<sup>4</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, cited by H. Diem "Kierkegaard's Bequest to Theology", A Kierkegaard Critique, p. 246.





supreme values of rational cognition and freedom. This is why Christianity has to do with the individual.

Thus, if the problem is how to become a Christian in a bankrupt Christendom, Kierkegaard realizes that men must again be led to think of themselves as individuals who are confronted with choices which nobody can make for them. Consequently, "the individual" became his most important category. As he explored this category, describing man in all the facets of his experience, he created a new view of man, the "existential man". In so doing he offered an alternative to the two pictures of man which are so influential today, the picture of the positivist and marxist man.<sup>5</sup>

Positivist man is the product of the nineteenth century Enlightenment. He takes his cues from the central fact which distinguishes our civilization from all others, namely science. He believes with Comte that man has reached the final of the three stages of development, the positive stage. He accepts Ayer's limitation of the real to that which can be empirically verified. Thus he remains within his biological and social context and never ventures into the regions where fear and trembling start. He is almost obsessed by an unshaken optimism about the expansion of technical mastery over nature. In ethical questions he is a relativist, in religious issues an agnostic. Essentially he is "homo faber", the technological animal. And while he wants to be on the side of enlightenment, he goes on to tinker with his

---

<sup>5</sup>For further detail see John Wild, The Challenge of Existentialism.



environment stubbornly refusing to even look at data which do not fit into his framework, even though the ground under his feet is shaking already.

Marxist man is also an offspring of the nineteenth century. He too is a creature of technology, but equipped with an ideology, or better perhaps, with a secular religion which tells him that he is the chosen collaborator of History. Like positivist man, marxist man has no categories for the unique facts of human personality. It is the cause of the party which comes first and to which the individual is subordinated.

At the present these two views of man stand opposed to each other and it is difficult to predict how they will fare in the future. But whether positivist man triumphs or marxist man is victorious, or eventually a synthesis of the two emerges (there are many points of contact between the two) the understanding of man is a thin and oversimplified one. It leaves out of consideration a whole bundle of experiences which are just as empirical as those it examines and it cuts off his spiritual roots.

In the thought currents of his time which would eventually find their culmination in positivist and marxist man, the lone Danish thinker decided to defend the category of "the individual" without which man could not truly be man and must remain alienated from the transcendent sources of his being.

Fundamental in his understanding of the individual is the concept of dread. His book of the same title is therefore not only a more or less incidental psychological investigation into the nature and origin of





sin but "an exceedingly skilful attempt to explain all human activity, good as well as evil, in terms of an irrational factor."<sup>6</sup> Thus Price writes,

The book (The Concept of Dread), therefore is not a casual contribution, it is integral to his total view of man...It also follows that Kierkegaard did not stumble accidentally on the idea of dread and then attach it to his concept of man as an interesting embellishment. It rather belongs wholly to the latter concept and arises from it. Dread belongs to the middle of man's being, to the will, to freedom. It is to freedom what the pulse is to the heart--symptom and proof of its living vitality. It is the evidence of a self grounded in freedom--that is, of a unique being in a universe where all else is subject to necessity. Kierkegaard's case is that the presence of dread in man indicates that he is a certain sort of being, and, inversely, the fact of dread (which can not be denied) requires a certain view of man to explain it. To attach it to a different view of man is to destroy its meaning, and finally to misunderstand both dread and man.<sup>7</sup>

Kierkegaard in his study of dread makes two important assertions which are to be analysed in this paper. He suggests that dread plays such an important part in man's life that no study of man's nature can be complete without recognizing this. Again, he insists that dread is not only a creative aspect of man but is furthermore a theological concept, pointing to man as a creature of God.

However, before this analysis can be undertaken, two preliminary investigations need to be done. First, it is necessary to point in a biographical study to the role of dread in Kierkegaard's own life. Secondly, his attack on reason and the concept of man as a thinking being, which in turn led to a new view of man, must be traced.

---

<sup>6</sup> G. Price, The Narrow Pass, p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 64.



Chapter IV will deal with the analysis of the concept of dread and Chapter V is to show how Kierkegaard's conclusions were corroborated by contemporary psychological studies and phenomena of the twentieth century. In the conclusion the attempt is made to interpret dread theologically.





## CHAPTER II

### BIOGRAPHY<sup>8</sup>

The thought that in every generation there are two or three who are sacrificed for others, used in frightful suffering to discover what redounds to the benefit of others, goes very far back in my recollection; and in my melancholy I understood myself as marked out in this way.<sup>9</sup>

From childhood Kierkegaard regarded himself as an exception, cut off from others, marked out by genius and the suffering which is its sign. In his Journals one can trace this idea as it is slowly and painfully clarified by thought and experience. It emerged in a "frightful foreboding" and was confirmed with the sudden violence of what he called "the great earthquake". For a time he rebelled against his destiny and took "the terribly easy way out: despair". His engagement to Regina Olsen became the turning point. Unable to break his self-isolation and to confide in her the secret of his melancholy, he acquiesced in his fate. "When I left her", he wrote, "I chose death. That is why I have been able to work so enormously." In the remaining fourteen years of his life he literally drove himself to death, publishing an incredible amount of writings.

The events of Kierkegaard's short and yet so profoundly dramatic life can be arranged around four central peaks; his formation at the hand of his father, the unhappy love affair with Regina Olsen, his collision

---

<sup>8</sup>The basic source of information for this section comes from Walter Lowrie, A Short Life of Kierkegaard.

<sup>9</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Point of View, p. 79.



with the press and the mob, and his attack on the Established Church of Denmark.

### Father and Son

Soren Aabye Kierkegaard was born on May 5, 1813, the year "when so many other mad bank-notes were put into circulation, and I can best be compared to one of them."<sup>10</sup> His father, Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard, born in Jutland in 1756, spent his early youth moving across the bleak moors of the peninsula as a shepherd lad. At the age of twelve he came to Copenhagen to become an apprentice with his mother's brother. In a rapid career which became proverbial in the Danish capital he became the leading wholesaler in the linen trade and could afford to retire in his early forties in order to devote himself to meditation and the training of a large family. His first wife had died childless in 1796. A year later he married his servant, Anna Sorensdatter Lund, by whom he had seven children. Soren Kierkegaard was the youngest child of the family, his father and mother respectively being fifty-six and forty-five at the time of his birth.

Kierkegaard never speaks of his mother, although he loved her dearly and felt her loss keenly when she died in 1834. She does not seem to have had much influence upon him. His father, however, proved to be a powerful force in his moral and spiritual life. The old man, who combined the ardent fervor of Moravian pietism with a mysterious melancholy, often suffering from attacks of depression and doubting the salvation of his

---

<sup>10</sup>Alexander Dru (ed. and trans.), The Journals of Kierkegaard, p. 131, #477.





soul, initiated young Soren into a stern and sombre Christianity, in which sin assumed a catastrophic aspect and duty took on the form of drama. Thus Kierkegaard could note that his father had filled his soul with anguish concerning Christianity. Later he wrote that "Christianity with the terror removed is merely a Christianity of the imagination."<sup>11</sup>

Physically Soren was never very robust. Thin, frail-looking, slightly hunch-backed, he knew that he was ugly. But what he was lacking in physical appearance he more than made up in intellectual power. Soon he proved himself as a prodigiously gifted pupil in school who had the respect, but not the affection of his fellow students. The subtle religious discussions which Soren's father, who was quite knowledgeable in theology and philosophy, liked to indulge in with the leading scholars of Copenhagen formed a precocious introduction to theology and ethics. His imagination was kindled by the father's educational methods, who would often take his son for a walk without leaving the room, vividly and accurately describing far and near places from a castle in Spain to the street in Copenhagen. Looking back on his childhood, Kierkegaard later noted:

As a child I was strictly and most severely trained in the Christian religion. Humanly speaking this bringing up was a species of madness, for my earliest childhood was made to groan under impressions too heavy even for the melancholy old man who laid them upon me.<sup>12</sup>

It was a crazy sort of upbringing, where he never remembered

---

<sup>11</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 524.

<sup>12</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, The Point of View, p. 76.



having been a child.<sup>13</sup> But conscious of being an exception, Kierkegaard considered this extraordinary upbringing as justified and was immeasurably grateful to his father later.

His secondary school career completed, Kierkegaard went on to the university in 1831 and began reading theology upon the wish of the father. Hegel's influence was preponderant at the time and rationalism demanded recognition as the perfect form of speculation. Kierkegaard, for whom logic had always been a "passionate delight" had no difficulties in entering into the subtleties of Hegelian dialectic. Yet, although he admired Hegel, he refused to let himself be carried away by the idealistic current. His resistance began to assert itself gradually in the name of what he later called existential reality.

Thus he reached his twentieth year. As he moved out into the intellectual world, his trusting admiration for his father suffered a long eclipse. Under great mental anguish he began to search for a purpose in life. It is during this time that he became aware that his vocation was to devote himself to making things more difficult.<sup>14</sup> In the course of this searching, he rejected a career in the sciences.

Enthusiastic as I have been and still am about the natural sciences it seems to me, however, that I shall not make them into my principal study. Life has interested me most in virtue of reason and freedom, and to elucidate and solve the riddle of life has always been my desire.<sup>15</sup>

A growing doubt about Christianity appeared.

---

<sup>13</sup>Alexander Dru, op. cit., pp. 108-111, #413.

<sup>14</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, pp. 165-66.

<sup>15</sup>Alexander Dru, op. cit., p. 7, #16.





In Christianity itself the contradictions are so great that, to say the least, they prevent a clear view. As you know, I grew up, so to speak, in orthodoxy; but as soon as I began to think for myself the tremendous colossus began to totter.<sup>16</sup>

And the theme began to emerge, which was destined to become the fundamental thought of his message:

What I really lack is to be clear in my mind WHAT I AM TO DO, not what I am to know, except in so far as a certain understanding must precede every action. The thing is to understand myself, to see what God really wishes ME to do; the thing is to find a truth which is true FOR ME, to find THE IDEA FOR WHICH I CAN LIVE AND DIE.<sup>17</sup>

But even during this period of searching and questioning, which is reflected in the Journal by passages of Nietzschean character, his conception of Christianity, which will later dominate his thought, began to cristallize. So he wrote:

And how is it that there are many who, so they say, discover Christian impulses in their consciousness, but who on the other hand neither are nor give themselves out to be Christians. It is probably because CHRISTIANITY IS A RADICAL CURE which people shrink from...it is probably this, that they lack the strength to make a despairing LEAP.<sup>18</sup>

All these thoughts are still in an embryonic stage in this period. For the time being Kierkegaard abandoned religious observances and gave himself up to a life of cafes and pleasure. In public he appeared as the young dandy, spending heavily on the aesthetic futilities and denying himself nothing in the way of food and drink, dressing exquisitely in accordance with the smallest details of fashion, incurring fairly heavy

---

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 8, #16.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 15, #22.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 22, #32.



debts. Yet, all this seems to have been a desperate attempt to overcome his inner sadness and doubts. He has said of these youthful years that after noisy banquets where, with his dazzling wit, he had won the admiration of all present, he would go home with despair in his soul.

I have just returned from a party of which I was the life and soul; wit poured from my lips, everyone laughed and admired me--but I went away--and the dash should be as long as the earth's orbit...  
.....and wanted to shoot myself.<sup>19</sup>

Due to all this turmoil, young Kierkegaard's studies lagged far behind. His examinations were constantly deferred. The father looked sadly at these excesses which were in sharp contrast to the simple and austere family life. Communication with the old man broke down completely and separation became necessary. It was agreed that Kierkegaard would receive an annual allowance of 500 rixdalers which in addition to the fees from his temporary work as a Latin teacher would permit him to live in comparative comfort.

Henceforth Kierkegaard had complete freedom. The break with his father seemed to be final. The inner torment continues during this period from ca. 1837-38. In the Journal he notes: "It seems as though I were a galley-slave, chained to death; every time life moves the chains rattle and death withers everything--AND THAT HAPPENS EVERY MINUTE."<sup>20</sup> What exactly does Kierkegaard refer to? Did he suffer from some physical defect? Was it a torment of a moral nature? Was he experiencing the radical failure of the aesthetic life, the life which makes enjoyment its

---

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 27, #53.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 47, #136.





main principle? The "thorn in the flesh", often referred to in the Journal, contains probably something of all of these factors.

It was then that the great earthquake occurred, the frightful upheaval, which suddenly impressed on me a new, unmistakable interpretation of every phenomenon. Then I began to suspect that the advanced age of my father was not a divine blessing, but rather a curse; that the remarkable intellectual powers of our family only existed to mutually harrow each other; then I felt the silence of death increase about me, when in my father I saw a man of misery who would outlive us all, a stone on the grave of all his own hopes. Some guilt must be hanging over the whole family, some punishment from God be upon it; it would vanish, wiped out by the mighty hand of God, obliterated as an unsuccessful experiment...<sup>21</sup>

There can be no doubt that the "great earthquake" came to play a radical and fateful part in Kierkegaard's life. It is not exactly known what the "frightful upheaval" consisted of, but the consequences of this event are clear: Kierkegaard came to believe that the whole family should be obliterated. This belief was not entirely without foundation. There had been seven children in the linen trader's family. But at the end of 1834 only two were alive, Soren himself and his brother Peter, who was eight years older. All the others had died, three of them in the years 1833-34. Their mother had also died in 1834. Only the old father and two sons remained.

From other writings it is evident that Kierkegaard firmly believed that the maximum age he would reach, would be thirty-four years. Thus when he reached that age he noted in his Journal:

How extraordinary that I have completed my thirty-fourth year. It is quite incomprehensible to me; I was so sure of dying before or on that birthday that I am almost tempted to suppose that my birthday was incorrectly registered, and that I may still die

---

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 66-67, #243.



on the 34th.<sup>22</sup>

Scholars investigating the life of Kierkegaard have been greatly preoccupied with the question of what this guilt was which in Kierkegaard's opinion rested like a burden of original sin over the whole family, explaining why the family was to be wiped out as a penalty. Two facts are revealed, both concerning the life of Kierkegaard's father. An entry in the Journal reads:

How terrible about the man who once as a little boy, while herding the flocks on the heaths of Jutland, suffering greatly, in hunger and in want, stood upon a hill and cursed God--and the man was unable to forget it even when he was eighty-two years old.<sup>23</sup>

When the publisher of Soren Kierkegaard's posthumous documents placed this entry before Bishop Kierkegaard, Soren's elder brother, in 1865, he burst into tears, saying: "That is the story of my father--and ours, too."<sup>24</sup>

The other fact has to do with the father's second marriage. Michael Pedersen's first wife died on March 23, 1796; on April 26, 1797 he married his second wife, whose first child was born scarcely five months after the wedding. According to the standards of the father and of that society this constituted a severe violation of God's Commandments.

For the purpose of this paper it is not of major importance to attempt to establish what possible sin or sins are the cause of the "great earthquake". The main point here is that Kierkegaard definitely

---

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 202, #655.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 150, #556.

<sup>24</sup>F. Brandt, Soren Kierkegaard, p. 13.





believed in the obliteration of the whole family and his early death.

During the early months of 1838 Kierkegaard again began to approach Christianity. In May of the year he apparently experienced a religious break-through of considerable depth. The entry in the Journal, dated 19th May, reminds one of Pascal's experience:

Half-past ten in the morning. There is an indescribable joy which enkindles us as inexplicably as the apostle's outburst comes gratuitously: 'Rejoice'.--not a joy over this or that but the soul's mighty song 'with tongue and mouth, from the bottom of the heart': 'I rejoice through my joy, in, at, with, over, by, and with my joy'--a heavenly refrain, as it were, suddenly breaks off our other song; a joy which cools and refreshes us like a breath of wind, a wave of air, from the trade wind which blows from the plains of Mamre to the everlasting habitations.<sup>25</sup>

At this time there came about a reconciliation with the father, who died a few months later in August 1838. It was a great shock for Kierkegaard who had not expected this. The Journal has the following paragraph:

My father died on Wednesday (the 9th) at 2 a.m. I had so very much wished that he might live a few years longer, and I look upon his death as the last sacrifice which he made to his love for me; for he did not die from me but DIED FOR ME in order that if possible I might still turn into something.<sup>26</sup>

After having published a short paper about Hans Andersen as a writer of novels with the characteristic title: From The Papers of One Still Living, Kierkegaard set out to redeem the promise he had given his father. In July 1840 he passed his final examinations in theology, and thus ended his ten-year period as an undergraduate which had been so rich

---

<sup>25</sup>Alexander Dru, op. cit., p. 59, #207.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 62, #215.



in inward experiences.

### Regina Olsen

Already in 1837 Kierkegaard had met Regina Olsen, who at that time was only fourteen years old. The sentiment which he felt at once toward her was the starting point of an extraordinary adventure, whose repercussions upon his life and his works were profound. His courtship was deliberate and steady. He experienced the triumph of winning Regina, daughter of a government official, from a previous suitor. She was pretty, happy, and bubbling over with life; and she worshipped Kierkegaard. The engagement took place in September 1840. But immediately afterwards Kierkegaard was convinced that he had done wrong and that marriage would be impossible. It was, in the words of one biographer, as if

on such and such a day, in such and such a year, Saint Simeon Stylites stepped down from his column, offered his arm to a young lady, and invited her to step up with him on the top of the column in order to share with him his narrow standingroom.<sup>27</sup>

Numerous ways of bringing about the inevitable break ran through his head, including taking her as a concubine, tricking her into rejecting him, and marrying her without revealing his secret. The idea of behaving so outrageously that Regina would voluntarily dismiss him, made the strongest appeal. But no matter how cunning his attempts, he could not dislodge her deep trust in him. Thus he was compelled to take the initiative and bring about a break. In August 1841 the decision, which

---

<sup>27</sup>David Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard, p. 14.





was to set him on the course for his life's task, was made. He returned her ring with the following note:

So as not to make further trial of what has to happen, which, when it has happened, will surely give strength as it is needed: then let it be done. Above all, forget him who now writes this: forgive a man who, even if he was able to achieve something, yet was unable to make a girl happy. In the Far East, to be sent a silken cord means death to the recipient; here to send a ring is surely sentence of death to him who sends it.<sup>28</sup>

But his fiancée would not let him go. Two months more passed, called by Kierkegaard the "period of horror", before the final break took place. The young girl protested that a separation would kill her, and her father, though a very proud man, visited Kierkegaard to beg him to reconsider. But Kierkegaard remained immovable, trying to play the role of a scoundrel and deceiver, although never really convincing Regina.

In obscure utterances Kierkegaard often mentioned in the Journal his reasons for having to break the engagement. He speaks most frequently of his relationship with his father, of his melancholy disposition, of his life "ante acta", of his thorn in the flesh, of his inability to realize the universal, and of marriage, which at the wedding demands frankness.

But if I were to reveal myself I should have to initiate her into things most terrible, my relationship with Father, his melancholy, the eternal darkness which broods in my innermost parts, my excursions into lust and debauchery.<sup>29</sup>

In later years Kierkegaard wondered whether he might not have discovered in religion some basis for the hope of marriage. He confessed

---

<sup>28</sup>Quoted in Brandt, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 16.



that the real failure of the marriage plans was to be found in his lack of faith. As he observed about himself, he had the courage to doubt all things but not courage to know and to take possession of all things. Fundamentally it was his faith that all things are possible to God which was put to the test in his love for Regina.

Yet, against these self-recriminations Kierkegaard also marshalled religious considerations of another kind.

Ought a soldier of the advanced guard to be married? Dare a soldier on the frontier (spiritually understood) take a wife, a soldier on duty at the extremest outpost, who is fighting day and night, not exactly against Turks and Scythians, but against the robber bands of an innate melancholy, a soldier of the outpost, who even though he does not fight day and night, though for a considerable period he has peace, yet never can know at what instant the war will begin again, since he cannot even dare to call this quiet a truce.<sup>30</sup>

He came to believe that he was asked to forego the security and consolation of ordinary life in order to further the positive ends of providence. He had received sealed orders, and those orders demanded: Go further!

### The Corsair Incident

During the year of engagement Kierkegaard had written his master's thesis entitled On the Concept of Irony, with Special Reference to Socrates. The book is remarkable not only for its unusual sharpness of dialectic, but also for its sparkling wit. Kierkegaard was himself a master of irony.

Now, after the final rupture of his engagement, he discovered that

---

<sup>30</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Stages on Life's Way, p. 188.





he had chosen not only "death" but also a literary career. Forsaking Regina released the first great swell of his aesthetic writings<sup>31</sup> which all date from 1843.

A further result of the break was Kierkegaard's preoccupation with the problem of Christianity and the Christian life. More and more he became convinced that it will be his destiny to address his contemporaries on this topic. The point of view which he proposed to develop is that "all things are new in Christ". In radical contradiction to the philosophy of his time, which had concerned itself with reducing Christianity to the known and classified forms of the past because its rationalism made it unable to discover in Christianity anything exceeding the common denominator, Kierkegaard refused to dwell on the characteristics which Christianity had in common with other religions. He grasped and developed with force the other necessary aspect of the Christian phenomenon, namely, that "Christianity is what has never entered any man's head."<sup>32</sup>

This project, like all his literary activity, was the result of the union which took place in him at this time between the poet which he became by following his nature and the religious feeling which had dominated him continually since childhood.<sup>33</sup> In default of having been young, he became a poet, which is second youth. But his essentially religious character intervened at the same time to give a religious orientation to his poetic vocation. The factors which determined his

---

<sup>31</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, Repetition, Fear and Trembling.

<sup>32</sup>Regis Jolivet, Introduction to Kierkegaard, p. 22-23.

<sup>33</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, The Point of View, pp. 84 ff.



career as an author were, like everything else in him, dialectic.

Only a solitary life could assure him both the leisure for meditation and study and the liberty which the expression of his ideas demanded. Thus, apart from four journeys to Berlin, of which one followed immediately upon the break with Regina in order to attend the lectures of Schelling, Kierkegaard lived permanently in Copenhagen. On his father's death, he had received 31,000 rixdalers. This money together with royalties from his writings allowed him to live in comfortable independence and to devote himself to his life's task.

Solitude, however, did not shelter him from public curiosity. His early writings, despite the much discussed use of pseudonyms, attracted much attention. Because of this and his eccentric way of life he acquired a kind of celebrity in his native city.

Apart from his few journeys and his famous strolls through the streets of Copenhagen in the company of friends, Kierkegaard lived at home in solitude behind closed doors. He preferred to work at night. "At night I was no longer alone",<sup>34</sup> he wrote. As darkness fell all rooms in his spacious living quarters were brightly lit. In each room there was always ink and paper. Then, when all was silent, he would write with feverish haste, pouring out his thoughts born in the crucible of life's experience, heedful of the call which determined his life's mission.

In the fall of 1845, a few months before the publication of the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, the talented critic P. L. Moller,

---

<sup>34</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Stages on Life's Way, p. 307.





who aspired to the Chair of Aesthetics at the University of Copenhagen, wrote a review of the existing pseudonymous works. This review triggered the so-called "Corsair dispute", which in many ways left a deep mark on the last ten years of Kierkegaard's short life.

Moller's review contained much praise and admiration, particularly for the description of the aesthetical sphere of life. But under the sham pretense of criticism the critic allowed himself some remarks of an impertinent and personal nature, casting doubt on Kierkegaard's moral integrity. This was all the more irritating as Moller himself had a bad reputation for loose living. Kierkegaard immediately wrote a scornful article, full of remarks calculated to arouse suspicion about Moller, in the distinguished daily paper The Fatherland. At the end he expressed the following desire: "If only I might soon appear in The Corsair! It is really hard for a poor author to be pointed out as the only figure in Danish literature who has not been abused in it."<sup>35</sup>

The Corsair was a small, but widely circulated and disreputable weekly under the editorship of Meyer Goldschmidt, a young, promising poet. P. L. Moller had been a secret contributor to the paper, a fact which, if known, would endanger his aspirations. Avidly read in many of Copenhagen's households, the paper indulged in scandal-mongering. Prominent personalities discovered their private failings in its pages. No one escaped its cynical treatment. It carried on a regime of terror and people feared "to be in the Corsair". So far, Goldschmidt had been

---

<sup>35</sup>Quoted in Brandt, op. cit., p. 70.



full of admiration for Kierkegaard. But now, publicly challenged by Kierkegaard, the Corsair attacked. From January 1846 the paper embarked on a stultification of Kierkegaard as an author and as a private individual. Week after week he was held up for public ridicule. His awkward gait and appearance, his daily habits and turns of speech were made the subject of sarcastic reports and searing cartoons. The incident degenerated into a street brawl. Street boys yelled "Old man either/or" after him. Prostitutes accosted the author of the Diary of a Seducer. As the "great philosopher with uneven pantlegs", Kierkegaard took his place among the comic characters of the contemporary scene. As a result of the whole controversy, Moller was forced to leave Denmark permanently and Goldschmidt, out of chagrin over the whole affair, suppressed the Corvair.

The incident taught Kierkegaard how it feels to be trampled on by a flock of senseless geese. In an empirical way he came to know about the corrupting power which an irresponsible press could bring to bear on all sections of society. Throughout the campaign the so-called responsible elements of society, the literary people and the representatives of Church and State, maintained a cowardly silence. Ordinary people were alienated from him either out of fear of a similar treatment and the pressure of majority opinion or because of a failure to discern the true issues of the incident. Analyzing the whole affair, Kierkegaard traced it back to a growing contempt for individual, existing men, which had its origin in Hegelian philosophy. In 1844 he had published the Philosophical Fragments and the Concept of Dread. At the height of the smear campaign in February 1846 his Concluding Unscientific Postscript appeared. These three books contain his contribution to the philosophical discussion of Hegel, which





was flourishing at the time, and contain in embryonic form much of the later existential revolt which would sweep over Europe in the aftermath of World War II.

Kierkegaard had planned to discontinue his writing after these works and to retire to a country pastorate. But the Corsair affair helped to clarify his mind about God's designs for him. More vividly than ever he realized that as an exceptional individual he was obliged to launch out on a lonely road. He was to undergo intense personal suffering in defiance of majority opinion and for truth's sake. This is what Christ demands of his followers. Yet, these demands had been watered down by the official spokesmen for Christianity and were completely forgotten. It became evident to Kierkegaard that the future would now be almost exclusively in the religious field. He had no doubt that this course would lead to a conflict with the Established Church which might cost him his honor and peace and perhaps even his life.

### Against Christendom

From the beginning of his formal authorship in 1843 Kierkegaard had published alongside of his pseudonymous books a series of Edifying Discourses, which openly contained his own convictions. Their common theme was man's moral and religious obligation as an individual, standing before God who is no respecter of majorities, establishments, or compromises.

After the Corsair incident Kierkegaard began to unveil the polemical edge of his critique of the Church in four other works.<sup>36</sup>



Then there was the "Adler case". A pastor by the name of Adler had experienced a profound religious crisis in 1843. As a consequence he abruptly abandoned his philosophical and theological studies in order to devote himself to the spiritual life. Slowly he came to think of himself as the immediate vehicle of Christ. All this gave doubt as to his mental condition and he was relieved of his pastoral duties by the ecclesiastical authorities.

Kierkegaard was greatly affected by the incident. In his view, the case raised the problem of the Established Church. Here, he thought, is a man who had studied theology for years. He had held an official position in the Church. Now, only later he discovers Christianity by virtue of a personal experience. Because of this he is dismissed. This seems to place the Church outside Christianity. Kierkegaard often wondered whether the Church and all of the so-called Christian society was not in need of a crisis similar to the one Adler experienced.<sup>37</sup>

Kierkegaard's second great religious experience, which came in 1848 as a conviction that he ought to speak out openly, determined the course for the last years of his life. When the New Testament demands a renunciation of the world, he charged, it does not mean an easy coming to terms with it as it was practiced in the Church of Denmark. He vigorously cut through the prevailing atmosphere of illusion that surrounded

---

<sup>36</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits, (1847). Works of Love, (1847). Christian Discourses, (1848). The Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air, (1849).

<sup>37</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, The Journals, p. 303 (Dru 905).





Protestantism. On the grounds of simple human honesty, he asked church officials to make public admission of the discrepancy between the Christian ideal and their preaching. He challenged them to confess that they were no longer presenting New Testament Christianity in its full vigor, that they were no longer asking men to follow Christ in unconditional discipleship. The three hard-hitting books of this period (1850-52)<sup>38</sup> affirmed the substance of Christianity to be the following of Christ in His lowliness and heterogeneity with the world. The accepted position of Christendom is in sharp contrast to this. It does away with the need to choose Christ at a sacrifice to oneself and simply erases the distinction between the way of the world and the way of Christ. Whereas Luther had raised his voice in protest against the subordination of holy things to secular interests, Lutheranism has completely integrated the religious life with the bourgeois order.

Until the death of Bishop Mynster, the Primate of the Danish Church and an old friend of his father, in January 1854, Kierkegaard contended himself with demanding an admission of the difference between Christianity and Christendom. But when Hans Martensen, the professor of theology who was to succeed Mynster as bishop, declared in his funeral oration upon the deceased representative of bourgeois respectability that Mynster had been a "witness to the truth", Kierkegaard felt compelled to issue a strong protest. How could one call the bishop, who seems to have concerned himself only with the honors and profits attached to his

---

<sup>38</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity. For Self-Examination, Judge for Yourself.





powerful position, who identified Christianity with the established order and reduced his vocation to the exercise of a public office, a witness to the truth? Wrote he:

A witness to the truth is a man whose life has brought him profound knowledge of inner conflicts, fear and trembling, temptation, spiritual distress, moral suffering. A witness to the truth is a man who bears witness to the truth in poverty, in humiliation and contempt, misunderstood, hated, mocked at, despised, ridiculed. A witness to the truth is a martyr.<sup>39</sup>

A controversy in the strict sense of the word never developed. Martensen remained silent, except for a single angry outburst, which only showed that he had no understanding for the issue at stake. Kierkegaard took his case against the Established Church into the streets. Within a short time twenty-one articles appeared in the Fatherland. He printed nine additional pamphlets and extended his criticism and satire to all parsons. In a desperate "midnight cry" he adjured people to cease participating in official public worship which is only a counterfeit of Christianity.

At the height of this his fiercest attack, October 2, 1855, he was stricken down with paralysis of the lower limbs and carried to hospital. There he would neither receive his brother, who had always been critical of him and who was now a "royal official" of the State Church, nor accept communion at the hands of any ecclesiastical civil servant.

The moving record of Kierkegaard's last month on earth was preserved by his one lifelong friend Emil Boesen. It shows a man whose earthly task was done and who now summoned all remaining strength for his hour of death. He prayed that despair might not take hold of him. Asked

---

<sup>39</sup>Quoted in Regis Jolivet, op. cit., p. 34-35.



whether his hope rested on belief in the grace of God in Christ, he replied: "Yes, of course, what else?" He died peacefully on November 11, 1855. But his body was laid to rest only after the young intelligentsia of Copenhagen, whose admiration Kierkegaard had eventually won, formed a guard of honor round his coffin in the church and his own nephew raised a protest against the final intervention of the Established Church which had insisted that Kierkegaard be given a proper burial.

As poor as his life may have been in regard to exterior events, it was full of inner conflicts and dramatic tensions which made it impossible for him to write about dread as a neutral, detached analyst. The massive concreteness of his inner experiences of dread refused to be explained away by the philosophical methods of his time which had great trouble in accounting for the evident facts of individuation, time, and contingency. He refused to press the real experiences of his life into thought categories which would not fit. If a theory can not do justice to all the evidences then it must be discarded, for thought does not contain life but life contains thought. Thus, as he struggled with the turmoils of his inner life, he began to search for a view of life that could account for the various experiences of the individual in his existence, for a view of life that could speak to him.





## CHAPTER III

### TOWARD A NEW VIEW OF MAN

As stated earlier, there can be no doubt about the fact that Kierkegaard is basically a Christian thinker. His father had initiated him into a stern and sombre form of Christianity and young Soren had chosen to be a Christian with all the seriousness and passion that are so characteristic of him. Consequently he never aimed at being a philosopher and all his philosophical writings were incidental to his main purpose, to show what it means to be a Christian and this in turn was incidental to the task of becoming one. Early in his life he was deeply stirred by the contrast of a purely nominal Christianity around him and what he thought was the authentic Christian way of life. This difference between thinking and talking as a Christian and actually existing as one is vividly expressed in a passage from his book Training in Christianity.

Sacred history has handed down to us the story of still another admirer--it was Nicodemus. In established Christendom a sermon is preached every year on Nicodemus--by all these thousands and thousands of parsons. The subject is treated thus. The Parson says: 'Fundamentally, Nicodemus was a weak man; instead of joining Christ openly, he came to Him stealthily by night, for fear of men.' The Parson pleases himself by this discourse, and it finds favor in the eyes of the congregation--and in fact it is exceedingly courteous, for tacitly the suggestion is smuggled in that the Parson and all those present are people of a totally different sort from Nicodemus--they confess Christ quite openly, without any fear of men...

Everybody who has any knowledge of men, and is not restrained from being honest by regard for money--or by fear of men--must concede unconditionally that in each generation a Nicodemus is a great rarity. When danger seriously threatens--and one is a superior person, and the danger is insult, mockery, ejection from society--verily there are to be found in every generation--among superior persons, who indeed in such a case have much to lose--there are





to be found very, very few, perhaps only a single individual, with feeling enough for the truth to go out at night to communicate with it. Nicodemus was an admirer; the actual danger was too much for him; personally he desired to keep aloof. Yet, on the other hand, the truth concerned him so much that he sought to get into relationship with it. Secretly by night--for he was treading forbidden paths--he stole to the despised truth; it had already cost him an effort to make this venture of seeking the society of this despised person. For dark as the night was, and carefully as he hid himself in his cloak, it was nevertheless possible that some one might have seen and recognized him, it was possible that he might have run into some one who promptly would have denounced him; and, finally, what assurance had he that the man whom he visited might not make such a use of it as would be injurious to Nicodemus' good name and fame...

One sees here what an admirer is, for Nicodemus never became a follower. It is as if Nicodemus might have said to Christ, 'In case we come to an understanding, I will accept thy teaching in eternity--but not here in this world, no, that I can not do. Couldst thou not make of me an exception? Might it not suffice if I come to thee from time to time by night? But by day--oh, yes, I acknowledge it, I feel how humiliating it is for me, how shameful it is, and also how insulting it really is to thee--but by day I do not recognize thee, by day I shall say, I know not this man!' You see here in what a web of falsehood an admirer entangles himself--and do not forget that in established Christendom there is no real danger which might make it perfectly evident whether one might not be only an admirer...

The danger which once was involved in confessing Christ has passed away since we have all become Christians, and to that extent the distinction admirer-follower has passed away. The next danger, which is brought about by taking seriously Christ's requirement of self-denial and the renunciation of worldly things, they have also wanted to do away with by endeavoring falsely to transform the Christian life into hidden inwardness, kept so carefully hidden that it does not become noticeable in one's life. One should be willing to deny oneself in hidden inwardness, in hidden inwardness to renounce the world and all that is of the world, but (for God's sake! shall I say?) one must not let it be observed. In this way, established Christendom becomes a collection of what one might call honorary Christians, in the same sense as one speaks of honorary doctors who get their degree without having to take an examination. In hidden inwardness we all take degrees, or rather we all receive them, each from the other, as a compliment...<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, pp. 240-246.



It is important to note here that Kierkegaard's emphasis on the individual, on inwardness, and subjectivity in contrast to speculative objectivity is not a defence of spiritual quietism. The concept of authentic existence which underlies his thinking is not that of a mystical communion with a transcendent being or a pantheistic all-engulfing being. In the same way, it is also not a drifting with a great evolutionary current or any other form of self-abandonment. This all runs counter to the principle of the individual who is in this world and who has to come to terms with himself and with God before he can really take his place in the world. This is the task of a lifetime.

It is then the shocking contrast between Christianity as it was commonly preached and discussed and as it might be actually lived, between talking and thinking about Christianity in prevailing Hegelian modes and actually being a Christian, which is the key to Kierkegaard's life and writings. His thought can be best understood as a rebellion against the abstract objectivism or essentialism of his time, a rebellion in which he came to attack reason and the view of man as "res cogitans".

#### A. The Attack on Reason

My only analogy is Socrates. My task is a Socratic task--to revise the conception of what it means to be a Christian. I do not call myself a Christian (keeping the ideal free) but I can reveal the fact that others are still less entitled to the same name than I am.<sup>41</sup>

It was by no means an accident that Socrates held a special place in Kierkegaard's affections. As the ancient thinker played the role of a

---

<sup>41</sup>Quoted in Swenson, Something About Kierkegaard, p. 37.





gadfly for his fellow citizens in Athens, stinging them into awareness of their ignorance, so the Danish Socrates kept buzzing around the easy conscience of an age that was resting snugly in the conviction of its own material progress and intellectual enlightenment. He was attracted by the power of Socrates' personality and by his basic philosophic principle. In comparison with a modern philosopher like Hegel, who could find a place for everything in his system, Socrates, who always insisted that he had no doctrine to teach, appeared to be a rather humble figure. But for Kierkegaard Socrates was the genuine philosopher and Hegel only another "Herr Professor". For Socrates kept central what so many of his famous colleagues overlooked, namely that philosophy is a way of life, a manner of existence, and not a theory. He insisted that he could only teach by example, and what Kierkegaard learned from the example of the Greek sage became fundamental for his own life. Socrates is the midwife of Kierkegaard's conviction that existence and a theory about existence are not the same. This discrepancy of existence and reason he set out to explore in a radical way.

In the course of this investigation he clashed with the prevailing Hegelian philosophy. Much has been made of Kierkegaard's sweeping polemic against Hegel. But it needs to be pointed out that he was not interested in the fine shades of meaning and intricate details of Hegel's work. This was not merely one of the frequent philosophical skirmishes engaged in for more or less irrelevant reasons. In fact, his knowledge of Hegel's thought was to a great extent based on Hegelian and anti-Hegelian writings which appeared closely after the master's death, and not so much on the actual





works of Hegel himself.<sup>42</sup> Behind the bitter attack lay the recognition that Hegel was simply the spokesman for an influential stream of thought in the tradition of Western philosophy. After all, Hegel had only said aloud what had been the often hidden presupposition of Western thought since its beginning in Greece. When Hegel proclaims, "The Real is rational, and the Rational is real",<sup>43</sup> one may be tempted to regard this as just another typical pronouncement of a German idealist. Yet, the belief in a completely rational cosmos lies behind much of the philosophic tradition of the Western world. At the very dawn of this tradition Parmenides had stated, "The same thing exists for thinking and for being".<sup>44</sup> What can not be thought according to Parmenides can not be real. If existence can not be thought, but only be lived, then reason can either reduce existence to nothingness or attempt to produce existence through logic. Parmenides elected to follow the first alternative even though the results were startling and introduced a mistrust of sense experience into philosophy which has led to the most grotesque philosophic edifices.

Hegel, giving expression to the overinflation of reason in his time, chose the other possibility. The neat feat was accomplished by means of his famous dialectic. At the beginning there is the concept of being, a pure and empty concept without existence. This begets its opposite, Nothing, and out of the pair comes the mediating and reconciling concept that is the synthesis of both. This process goes on until at the

---

<sup>42</sup>James Collins, The Mind of Kierkegaard, p. 104.

<sup>43</sup>G. W. F. Hegel, Vorrede zur Rechtsphilosophie, Wks. Vol. VIII, p. 17.

<sup>44</sup>Parmenides, as cited in Kirk & Raven, The Presocratic Philosophers, p. 268.



proper stage one reaches the level of existence. Thus thought begets existence. The human implications of this bit of dialectic aroused Kierkegaard's passionate protest. He saw ordinary human existence, concrete and personal, being engulfed and swallowed up by reason. Thus he never tired of heaping ridicule upon Hegel's legerdemain.<sup>45</sup>

In Kierkegaard's opinion, reason's offence is a religious one. Christianity, for him, was a completely personalistic religion, depending upon a historical incarnation and revelation. It could not be understood "sub specie aeternitatis". Hegel, however, asserted that philosophy encompassed religion. There was nothing in Christian revelation which reason could not establish on its own. Still, he called himself a Christian. Had he admitted that he had passed out of Christianity, the whole Hegelian system could have been left unchallenged as a brilliant firework of dialectical virtuosity. But the embrace of Hegelianism was for Kierkegaard a greater threat to Christianity than any openly hostile movement because it would lead to confusion and misunderstanding of what it means to be a Christian. People may be deluded into believing that they are Christians when in fact they are not.

Thus Kierkegaard began to strike out on a new path in regard to the age-old problem of the relation of reason and existence. The rest of this section will be devoted to a more detailed analysis of his attack upon reason.

In order to avoid confusion, it is necessary to distinguish two

---

<sup>45</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Concept of Dread, pp. 11 ff.





meanings which the term "reason" has for Kierkegaard. Those who have not observed this point have levelled the charge of irrationalism<sup>46</sup> and of even denying the intrinsic rationality of reality<sup>47</sup> against him. But Kierkegaard does not take an antilogical and irrational position. After all, his attack upon reason is a very rational attack along Kantian lines. He distinguishes between what he sometimes termed "abstract thought" and "pure thought" (das reine Denken). This is quite apparent in the relationship of his two main philosophical works, Philosophical Fragments and the Concluding Unscientific Postscript. In the former he deals with "abstract" or "discursive" reason and in the latter he attacks the "pure" reason as it found its culmination in Hegel. The distinction between the two concepts is expounded by means of two theses directed against Hegel: a logical system is possible; an existential system is impossible.<sup>48</sup>

#### A Logical System is Possible

Kierkegaard never denies that the greater part of thinking is carried out in terms of objective, abstract reasoning. This is "abstract thought", in its formal sense of a rational activity grounded upon itself alone and subject to no authority outside itself, the mathematical, the so-called Cartesian reason with its own distinctive logic and methods."<sup>49</sup> It is practical in scope, confined to the narrow field of verifiable and

---

<sup>46</sup>De Ruggiero, Existentialism, pp. 43-44.

<sup>47</sup>Kuhn, "Existentialism and Metaphysics", The Review of Metaphysics, I, 1947, pp. 37-38.

<sup>48</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 99.

<sup>49</sup>George Price, op. cit., p. 89.





perceptible phenomena. As long as it remains within the boundaries of this field it is dependable. Thus the natural, mathematical, and social sciences which deal with objects through their essential natures, abstract relations, and inductively necessary laws give genuine knowledge within these methodic limits. However, they are not competent beyond the sphere of essence and possibility. For example, scientific laws do not determine the condition of the individual as such, nor do they give insight into the actual order of existence. Collins observes that

abstract thought is the theoretical counterpart of the aesthetic life. They are both carried on in the medium of possibility: poetizing and imagining transpire in the possibility of moods and sentiments, whereas abstract reasoning and induction transpire in the possibility of general categories.<sup>50</sup>

Scientific thought can even deal with man himself, but again, only in an abstract, general, and statistical way. Men, however, have difficulties in admitting this limitation. Again and again they try to use reason in order to obtain knowledge of what lies beyond the world of sensuous experience. The result can only be an illusion.

Important conclusions follow for the individual desiring to find out about the truths of Christianity before committing himself. First of all, "abstract" reason cannot "prove" the existence of God. Kierkegaard is here largely following the lines of Kant's arguments which showed that a logical demonstration of God was impossible.<sup>51</sup> Abstract reason fails in its attempt because it must always assume God's existence in the attempted proof. Thus when the proof is completed one realizes that what

---

<sup>50</sup>James Collins, op. cit., p. 122.

<sup>51</sup>Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, pp. 278-298.



one has proved does not require a proof and convinces only those who assume God's existence to start with.

But if when I speak of proving God's existence I mean that I propose to prove that the Unknown, which exists, is the God, then I express myself unfortunately. For in that case I do not prove anything, least of all an existence, but merely develop the content of a conception. Generally speaking, it is a difficult matter to prove that anything exists; and what is still worse for the intrepid souls who undertake the venture, the difficulty is such that fame scarcely awaits those who concern themselves with it. The entire demonstration always turns into something very different and becomes an additional development of the consequences that flow from my having assumed that the object in question exists. Thus I always reason from existence, not toward existence, whether I move in the sphere of palpable sensible fact or in the realm of thought. I do not for example prove that a stone exists, but that something existing is a stone.<sup>52</sup>

Secondly, abstract reason can only deal with "ideal" existence, never with "actual" existence. Thus in rational proofs of God one has to do with "God as a man-made idea".<sup>53</sup> It simply means that even in a logically valid demonstration of God's existence He exists only in the mind of the thinker but not factually. This point shall be further pursued in the next section which deals with the second proposition against Hegel, i.e. that an existential system is impossible.

Thirdly, Kierkegaard argues that because of the limitations of abstract reason even the Bible is invalidated as a basis for certainty. He cites with approval Lessing's famous statement that "contingent truths of history can never constitute a proof of the necessary truths of reason: that God raised a dead man does not prove that God has a son co-essential

---

<sup>52</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Fragments, pp. 49-50.

<sup>53</sup>George Price, op. cit., p. 90.





with himself".<sup>54</sup> The Bible is composed of historical documents. If one wanted to base an eternal happiness on historical knowledge (The problem of the Fragments) he would end in despair, "for nothing is more readily evident than that the greatest attainable certainty with respect to anything historical is merely an approximation".<sup>55</sup>

Thus Kierkegaard has shown the limitations of "abstract thought" or discursive reason in a perhaps even more radical manner than Kant. The discussion of his critique can be concluded with a passage from the Postscript which is at the same time very suitable to make the transition to the next section:

The thinker who can forget in all his thinking also to think that he is an existing individual, will never explain life. He merely makes an attempt to cease to be a human being, in order to become a book or an objective something, which is possible only for a Munchausen. It is not denied that objective thought has validity; but in connection with all thinking where subjectivity must be accentuated, it is a misunderstanding. If a man occupied himself, all his life through, solely with logic, he would nevertheless not become logic; he must therefore himself exist in different categories. Now if he finds that this is not worth thinking about, the choice must be his responsibility. But it will scarcely be pleasant for him to learn, that existence itself mocks everyone who is engaged in becoming purely objective.<sup>56</sup>

#### An Existential System is Impossible

Here we want to examine the second meaning which reason has for Kierkegaard, namely "pure thought". This is the concept of reason which was developed in German romanticism, crowned by Hegel, and bitterly

---

<sup>54</sup>G. E. Lessing, as cited in Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 86.

<sup>55</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 25.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 85-86.





attacked by Kierkegaard. Again, we have to begin this discussion with Kant, the father of modern philosophy.

In line with his goal "to deny knowledge in order to make room for 'faith',<sup>57</sup> Kant taught that existence can not be a concept.

In the mere concept of a thing no mark of its existence is to be found. For though it may be so complete that nothing which is required for thinking the thing with all its inner determinations is lacking to it, yet existence has nothing to do with all this.<sup>58</sup>

This, in effect, meant that abstract or discursive reason could never take hold of existence. For instance, if one thinks of an object and then thinks of the object as existing, the second concept does not add any determinate characteristic to the first. Kant gives here his famous example of the hundred thalers.<sup>59</sup> If one thinks of hundred real thalers and hundred possible thalers, the concept is still of one hundred thalers, not a cent more or less. Of course, in the order of existence there is a world of difference between the real hundred thalers and the only possible hundred thalers. But that is in life and not in thought.

Kierkegaard agreed with Kant that there is no bridge from the logically necessary idea to an actual existence. The attempts of both Spinoza and Leibniz to cross over that gap he considered as futile, charging that both thinkers had failed to observe the distinction between factual being and ideal being.<sup>60</sup> But he disagreed with what Kant thought

---

<sup>57</sup>Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, p. 29.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 505.

<sup>60</sup>Alexander Dru (ed. & transl.), The Journals of Kierkegaard, #1027,



followed from this, namely that the existent thing or noumenon is unknowable. Kant has no right to generalize the abstract thought as if it were the only form of attaining knowledge. Kierkegaard pointed to the fact that the individual man both exists and thinks as a single personal entity and that there can be some knowledge of the self in its personal being.

Here is a crossroad of modern philosophy. One can either accept Kant's surgery of reason and devote himself to the world of the phenomena or attempt to go beyond to the realm of the noumena. Positivism emphasizes the former possibility. As far as theoretical knowledge is concerned, it can do without existence. It wants to know about an object, and the fact of its existence does not tell anything about it. Existence is too general and too remote a quality to be represented to the mind. Since it can not be represented in a concept, all brooding over it can safely be dismissed.

The latter possibility was taken up by the German Romantics and in turn Hegel and Kierkegaard. Thus, despite Kierkegaard's polemic against Hegel, he agrees with him that one has to go beyond Kant's boundaries. But this development needs more attention.

The German Romantics were as deeply interested in the problems of knowing reality as they were deeply dissatisfied with the solutions of rationalism. Their own attempts started a philosophical movement of great creativity.

The originators were Lessing, Hamann, and Herder, who between

---

Soren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, p. 51, footnote 2.





them laid the foundation of the entire structure of Romantic thought. Lessing contributed the idea of the creative imagination and of organic development, producing the first of the philosophies of history; Hamann the idea of reality as a tension of opposites; and Herder the idea of nature as an organic unity--ideas which Hegel was to synthesize into a spectacular climax.<sup>61</sup>

Hamann (1730-88), the "Magus of the North", whom Kierkegaard admired greatly, needs to be singled out. He had based his philosophy on a radical opposition of faith and reason. Reason operates by the law of contradiction, and consequently the absence of a contradiction is always proof of its truth. It follows that reality as expressed by reason would be an uncontradictable proposition. Yet, faith reveals reality as a tension of opposites, i.e. mind over matter, determinism over freedom, and many others. Thus it appears that the more reason attempts to eliminate contradictions, the further it gets from the truth. The disjunction of faith and reason is an absolute. Now, reason for Hamann is the abstract, discursive reason which was restricted in its scope by Kant. However, faith was more for him than an exclusively religious emotion. It was "an inner experience of reality, a living comprehension which carried with it an immediate conviction of its own validity--an experience whose simplest expression was the consciousness of self and immediate environment..."<sup>62</sup>

This concept of faith was even more enlarged by subsequent Romantics until it became a capacity for grasping reality directly. Finally there came that extremely important change by which "faith was

---

<sup>61</sup>George Price, op. cit., p. 93.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 94.





replaced by reason (which had lost its function), and, in the final development of romantic philosophy, what was for Hamann a contrast between 'faith' and 'reason' now became a contrast between 'reason' and 'understanding'."<sup>63</sup> Thus what Hamann had called faith had now become reason.

It is this change that made it possible for Hegel to develop his notion of "pure thought" which is so crucial for his whole system. The "abstract" or "discursive" reason (which had now become 'understanding') which had received such a privileged position in traditional philosophy was seen now only as a part of an immensely productive process in which the world of our experience with all its contradictory elements is immediately grasped as a single world of objects in relation to one another. Why should it not be possible, armed with this new comprehensive "pure thought" to lay hold of all things, including the most ultimate?

Assuming that "pure thought" is productive of actual being, Hegel set out in a masterly fashion to create the all-comprehensive system. This speculative system, persuaded of its own sufficiency not only in regard to the complete content of knowledge but also in regard of its beginning as a self-priming start, purports to start immediately with the immediate. In this way it produces its own objects as the dialectic rolls along. The result is a comprehensive explanation of the totality of the world where every link follows necessarily step by step. The system ultimately is the divine Idea which has arrived at self-consciousness.

---

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 94.



Kierkegaard, although he agreed with Hegel's initial premise that the source of all knowledge is the immediacy of experience, saw in the Hegelian system a grave threat. He had a number of bitter and biting criticisms to offer.

1. Hegel in his Logic had claimed to have made an immediate beginning without any assumptions.<sup>64</sup> Examining the Logic, Kierkegaard found that by the "immediate" Hegel meant the most abstract content of being which remains after an exhaustive reflection upon various concepts. With this sort of principle, he charged, one can never make an immediate beginning.

How does the System begin with the immediate? That is to say, does it begin with it immediately? The answer to this question must be an unconditional negative. If the System is presumed to come after existence, by which a confusion with an existential system may be occasioned, then the System is of course ex post facto, and so does not begin immediately with the immediacy with which existence began; although in another sense it may be said that existence did not begin with the immediate, since the immediate never is as such, but is transcended as soon as it is. The beginning which begins with the immediate is thus itself reached by means of a process of reflection.<sup>65</sup>

Thus the immediate is not an initial point of thought, but a term which has been arrived at through a thought process which is prior to the starting point. It follows that Hegel's much heralded synthesis of the immediacy of experience with the power of reason still leaves one in the world of thought, of the ideal, of essence. We can never be certain of knowing the world independently. Our thought is always

---

<sup>64</sup>G. W. F. Hegel, Logic, Sect. 12, #86.

<sup>65</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Postscript, pp. 101-102.





involved. Thus the unknown remains the unknown and Hegel's claim to have broken through is simply an illusion.

2. Kierkegaard's polemic was also aroused by the easy transition from the individual to the absolute mind, or from man to God. This transition could only be made, if it could be shown that for a finite human self "to be" means "to be a movement of pure thought". But this is only possible in a fit of absentmindedness, forgetting about the reality of the existent individual.

If a dancer could leap very high, we would admire him. But if he tried to give the impression that he could fly, let laughter single him out for suitable punishment; even though it might be true that he could leap as high as any dancer ever had done. Leaping is the accomplishment of a being essentially earthly, one who respects the earth's gravitational force, since leaping is only momentary. But flying carries a suggestion of being emancipated from telluric conditions, a privilege reserved for winged creatures, and perhaps also shared by the inhabitants of the moon--and there perhaps the System will first find its true readers.<sup>66</sup>

To accomplish what Hegel thought he had accomplished, one would either have to be God or a fantastic quodlibet.<sup>67</sup>

3. The passionate antagonism of Kierkegaard was further kindled by the colossal world-historical speculations of the "Professor Hegel" which dismissed the individual in his concrete existence as insignificant.

Objection must be made to modern philosophy (Hegelian); not that it has a mistaken presupposition; but that it has a comical presupposition, occasioned by its having forgotten, in a sort of world-historical absentmindedness, what it means to be a human being.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., pp. 112-113.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 109.



Thus Hegelian "pure thought" builds its castles in the air in sheer distraction of mind without having an ethics with which philosophy must always be connected.

Being an individual man is a thing that has been abolished, and every speculative philosopher confuses himself with humanity at large; whereby he becomes something infinitely great, and at the same time nothing at all. He confounds himself with humanity in sheer distraction of mind, just as the opposition press uses the royal 'we', and sailors say: 'devil take me!' But when a man has indulged in oaths for a long time, he returns at last to the simple utterance, because all swearing is self-nugatory; and when one discovers that every street urchin can say 'we', one perceives that it means a little more, after all, to be a particular individual. And when one finds that every cellar-dweller can play the game of being humanity, one learns at last, that being purely and simply a human being is a more significant thing than playing the society game in this fashion. And one thing more. When a cellar-dweller plays this game everyone thinks it ridiculous; and yet it is equally ridiculous for the greatest man in the world to do it. And one may very well permit oneself to laugh at him for this, while still entertaining a just and proper respect for his talents and his learning, and so forth.<sup>69</sup>

#### B. Man not "Res Cogitans"

If then reason is limited to such an extent that it can not cross the boundaries into the noumenal sphere of God and self despite Hegel's valiant attempts, and thought appears to be only one aspect of the existent man, then it is perhaps also necessary to examine the understanding of the nature of man. Ever since the days of Descartes the human self has been identified with the mind, has been thought of as a thinking thing, dwelling in lonely isolation, and divorced from the external world of extended objects. The only data immediately available to it are its own private states or impressions. In the intricate and

---

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 113.





devious discussions of modern epistemology it has become increasingly obscure how any sort of inference to independent objects could be justified. Hence the so-called problem of the external world has become ever more pressing and confused. From this epistemological point of view knowing the world is the most basic way in which we can become related to it. Thus, if doubt is cast, as it certainly has been cast, on whether we can know the world, it is more and more dubious as to whether we can be related to it at all. The ghost of solipsism hovers over modern philosophy.

Kierkegaard felt that this problem was wholly artificial and that it arose from an unnecessary neglect of the data of human existence. In the Postscript he undertakes an analysis of Descartes' famous "cogito ergo sum".

The Cartesian 'cogito ergo sum' has often been repeated. If the 'I' which is the subject of 'cogito' means an individual being, the proposition proves nothing: I am thinking, ergo I am; but if I 'am' thinking what wonder that I 'am': the assertion has already been made, and the first proposition says even more than the second. But if the 'I' in 'cogito' is interpreted as meaning a particular existing human being, philosophy cries: 'How silly; here there is no question of your self or my self, but solely of the pure ego.' But this pure ego cannot very well have any other than a purely conceptual existence; what then does the ego mean? There is no conclusion here, for the proposition is a tautology.<sup>70</sup>

Thus it is evident that thinking is always given as an existent thinking, belonging to an existing person. Descartes' worst mistake was to postulate this thinking as a separate thing and to neglect the act of existing and its complex structure. "The real subject", writes

---

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 281.





Kierkegaard, "is not the cognitive subject, since, in knowing, he moves in the sphere of the possible; the real subject is the ethically existing subject."<sup>71</sup> This existing subject is related to the world in many other ways besides the knowing relation. By sense and feeling, for example, one is already aware of his own concrete being and of the factual situation into which one is thrown. True, intellectual cognition may have a greater revealing power, but when it alone is focused as in the abstract thought of the sciences on the essences and possibilities of things, many other ways are overlooked and its capacity to understand human nature is thus impaired. Kierkegaard saw clearly what results this kind of scientism would have on ethics and religion.

I always say: all honor to the sciences, etc. But the thing is that bit by bit people have tried to popularize the scientific spirit, it has forced its way down amongst the people--true religiousness has gone to pot, and existential respect is lost.<sup>72</sup>

Understanding is thus not only the product of a mind-thing isolated from the world. It is rather "a guiding phase of actual existence".<sup>73</sup> Feeling and understanding are not locked up within an isolated "Ego", but they are outstretchings of the human subject, ways of being in the world. They are essential phases of human existence. If this mutual interdependence of life and awareness could be explored, it would perhaps be possible to gain more adequate conceptions of man and,

---

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 281.

<sup>72</sup>The Journals of Kierkegaard, #1169.

<sup>73</sup>John Wild, "Kierkegaard and Contemporary Existentialist Philosophy," A Kierkegaard Critique, p. 33.



as a sort of by-product, the old epistemological problem of the reality of the outward world would be exposed as being of "merely academic interest".<sup>74</sup>

Now, in the post-Cartesian tradition of philosophy there was a tendency to interpret phenomena like moods and feelings as subjective passions or physiological disturbances occurring within the human organism which, however, had little or no cognitive significance. Kierkegaard, knowing from the experience of his own life how important feelings of dread, boredom, melancholy, and despair could be, challenged this dogma and set out to show their profound cognitive significance in a number of detailed studies. In these studies he began to employ a new tool.

### C. The Descriptive Method

Because of the results of his penetrating analysis of reason, "abstract" and "pure" alike, Kierkegaard was radically skeptical of all attempts to fit the rich content of concrete experience into the rigid framework of some a priori theory. He accuses all such views of simplifying and warping the data. The task is to abandon all a priori explanations and to simply begin to examine and describe the empirical data. One must be careful not to swallow plausible explanations and sweeping generalizations too easily, especially if they fail to do justice to the instances they are supposed to subsume. While modern philosophers have been interested in human nature, in man in general, Kierkegaard

---

<sup>74</sup>Gabriel Marcel, The Philosophy of Existence, p. 87.





attempts to describe the individual as he finds him in a great host of varieties. This seems to be an impossible task even for the acumen of a literary genius such as Kierkegaard, and he himself knew it.

It is far more difficult to describe one actor than to write a whole philosophy of art, and more difficult to describe one of his performances than to describe the actor. The more limited the material, the more difficult the task (the Chinese drama, the Middle Ages, Nordic Myths, Spain, etc.) because it is a direct test of the powers of description. The more one can depend on generalizations, the easier it is, for the material is so vast that all the completely abstract observations, which anyone can learn by heart, seem to mean something. But the more concrete the observations, the more difficult it is. God knows how long philosophers will continue puffing themselves up with the fantastic notion with which they deceive themselves and others, that generalization is what is difficult.<sup>75</sup>

This descriptive method as opposed to the speculative and abstract method of his day opened up new and exciting possibilities. Using it with superb skill, Kierkegaard set out to describe human existence in his famous aesthetical, ethical, and religious stages in his celebrated books Either/Or and Stages on Life's Way. He came to see ethics not as a study of fixed values and properties. Good and evil became ways of existing, and the highest human value was to be a human being, thinking and acting in the most intense degree as an individual, insights which are even now only on the verge of being recognized. But a discussion of these aspects is beyond the purpose and scope of this paper.

However, this method also enabled Kierkegaard to undertake a number of penetrating studies of what he called practical awareness. He rejected the pan-objectivist view that the world is exclusively composed of

---

<sup>75</sup>The Journals of Kierkegaard, #548.



physical objects because it leaves out the factors of existence and subjectivity. The essentialist view of the subject as a mental container or knowledge cut off from the surrounding world he found equally wanting because he held that this subject is an existing person interacting with other persons and things. Thus he set out on his own to describe this practical awareness.



## CHAPTER IV

### DREAD

Since in this paper we will analyze only one of Kierkegaard's inquiries into the practical awareness, i.e. the Concept of Dread, this is perhaps the best point to sketch out his view of man which was derived from these studies and then show how fundamental a role the concept of dread played in this view.

#### A. What Then is Man?

Early in his life, in August 1835, Kierkegaard gave already eloquent expression of the consuming passion of his life to find the idea for which he could live and die, to find the truth which would be truth for him.<sup>76</sup> He recognized that he had many things in common with other men, so much so that people have always tried to define man in universal terms applicable to all. But the truly remarkable thing about man, for Kierkegaard, was not his intellect (the rational animal) nor his structure (body, soul, and spirit), but what distinguishes him from all others to make him a particular individual. Thus he enquired how it comes about that a particular individual emerges from a mass of living material, from thoughts and feelings, dreams and drives, abilities and weaknesses, and imposes upon itself its own particular quality and direction. His conclusion was that the self is fashioned by a dialectical process within its own structure. We need to give some attention to this process and

---

<sup>76</sup>The Journals of Kierkegaard, #22.





begin with his own terse definition of man.

Man is a synthesis of the soulish and the bodily. But a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third factor. This third factor is spirit.<sup>77</sup>

One may be tempted to regard this as a re-statement of the conventional body-soul-spirit trichotomy. But Kierkegaard is not describing man here as a bundle of three parts. He is trying to "hold in a manageable formula that most illusive of all realities--human reality, the self which is neither body nor soul but a mysterious unity of physical and psychic activity."<sup>78</sup> His point is that, as far as the self is concerned, it is not aware of the body as "res extensa" and of the mind as "res cogitans". There are only events, bodily and mental, which are woven into the living fabric of the self. Thus people ordinarily do not think of their friends and sweethearts as bodies and souls but as persons. They are never aware of a mind-body gap. Man then is a synthesis of the soulish and the bodily, or the temporal and the eternal,<sup>79</sup> and these two make up the sum of our experiences. Yet, as Kierkegaard indicated in his formula, the soulish and the bodily may make a being capable of consciousness and sensation but they do not result in a man. A third factor, spirit, is needed. And again, he makes clear what he understands spirit to be: "Man is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation which relates itself to itself."<sup>80</sup> So, in other words, this third factor which comprehends the

---

<sup>77</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Concept of Dread, p. 39.

<sup>78</sup>G. Price, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>79</sup>Kierkegaard, op. cit., p. 76.



meaning and possibility of the other two is self-consciousness.

When he discusses the Genesis account of the creation he introduces further qualifications. He writes that in Adam, before the Fall, while he is still innocent, the spirit is dreaming. But when he has made a choice the spirit is posited<sup>81</sup> and Adam is now aware of himself as a self-conscious being with infinite possibilities. Adam's self-consciousness appears now in a modification of it, in the will. So Kierkegaard can state that self-consciousness

is the decisive criterion of the self. The more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness the more will, and the more will the more self. A man who has no will at all is no self; the more will he has, the more consciousness of self he has also...The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude which relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself.<sup>82</sup>

Admittedly, it is not the easiest thing to grasp the full intent of Kierkegaard's tense style of writing. But it appears to be clear that he thinks of man as a highly individualized pattern which has emerged from a synthesis of the soulish and the bodily and the spirit or will. Man is a unique being impossible to explain in terms of any single factor. And decisive is the emergence of the will.

The self then is a synthesis brought about by an act of will. As such, Kierkegaard adds, it is paradoxically the most contingent and yet the most concrete thing we know. It is contingent because it is not a solid substance like a rock but an interwoven pattern of relationships

---

<sup>80</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, p. 17.

<sup>81</sup>Kierkegaard, op. cit., pp. 37 ff.

<sup>82</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, pp. 43-44.





which has been brought about and which can be changed by an act of will.

It is concrete because it is the only thing we know with absolute certainty.

The most concrete content consciousness can have is consciousness of itself, not the pure consciousness, but the self-consciousness which is so concrete that no author...has ever been able to describe such a thing, although such a thing is what every man is. This self-consciousness is not contemplation; he who thinks that it is has not understood himself, for he sees that he himself is meanwhile in the process of becoming and so cannot be a finished product as the object of contemplation.<sup>83</sup>

Again, then the self must be seen not as a completed human entity. Rather, it is a "becoming". "Every instant it exists, is in process of becoming, for the self *κατα συνεισιν* does not actually exist, it is only that which is to become."<sup>84</sup> Here Kierkegaard is describing a rather familiar experience for most people. We do indeed devote a great deal of attention to the task of improving ourselves according to an ideal picture that we have of ourselves. Attempting to use what we think are the most suitable means we select friends, social environment, education, vocation, habits and tastes, thus we are always becoming, always on the way, and never finished products.

What makes the difference between person and person is not so much knowledge, feeling or experience, but the will,

The more will, the more freedom, for freedom is intensity of will; the more will the more consciousness; the more consciousness the more awareness of self; the more awareness of self, the fuller appreciation and use of all its powers,

---

<sup>83</sup>Concept of Dread, pp. 127-128.

<sup>84</sup>Sickness Unto Death, p. 44.



physically, mentally and spiritually...and consequently the more of self it becomes.<sup>85</sup>

To complete this sketch we need to point out that Kierkegaard is not thinking here of a limitless self-improvement. The self was planned in such a way that it would constitute a perfect balance, an equilibrium in which the soulish and the bodily are both exerted to their maximum possibility.<sup>86</sup> Until this equilibrium comes about the self remains in a disequilibrium, in a crippled version of the real self, and no amount of self-improvement can alter that. A decisive act is needed to bring about the equilibrium from which real development can take place. Now this act, writes Kierkegaard, can only be performed by means of a relation to God. It is achieved when a man's powers are integrated and combined in an act of conscious seriousness and deep intent to believe and to choose God who comes to him in the paradoxical God-Man Jesus Christ. It is an act of absolute willing which tenses the will to the breaking-point. But it heightens the self-consciousness and thus creates a new synthesis, the basis for future development.

If a man refuses this supreme task, his will is hopelessly split up and diverted among lesser, fleeting goals. The dialectical relationship is unresolved, disequilibrium prevails, the individual literally throws his life away. He has not become what he was planned to be. The self remains a broken system and does not really exist. This act of will or "qualifying leap", even though people will only attempt it under

---

<sup>85</sup>G. Price, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>86</sup>S. Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, pp. 18-19; 43-44.



extreme pressure and when they are brought to frontiers where decisions are unavoidable, is essential for an authentic becoming.

So the self is neither "soulish" nor "bodily" nor is it "will", but rather a reality which has emerged from their synthesis, human reality, or to use Kierkegaard's own expression, existence, i.e. that which stands out or emerges.

As he develops this dialectical structure of man, one is driven to the question: What starts the "process of becoming"? What is the force that makes man go? Kierkegaard's answer is one of his most original contributions in the study of man.<sup>87</sup> He insists that man's most fundamental endowment is an imperative to be himself. This "existential imperative" is a compulsion that cannot be denied. The attempt to do so results in frustration. It is, however, not a law imposed from without. In that case all men would develop by necessity and would all be the same.

The parallels to Spinoza's notion of "conatus" and Freud's "libido" are quite apparent here. "Conatus" was the "actual essence of the living thing itself".<sup>88</sup> It made the thing what it was. If it disappeared, the thing itself disappeared. Thus, "conatus" in man was the principle of self-conservation and, moreover, the principle of self-achievement. The strength or weakness of its thrust explained the differences between men. Kierkegaard was not unacquainted with Spinoza, who was being widely discussed during Kierkegaard's life time, and found

---

<sup>87</sup>Price, op. cit., p. 77, note 39.

<sup>88</sup>Spinoza, Ethics, Part III, Prop. 7.





much common ground in the latter's attempt to explain all human attitudes and decisions as arising from the "conatus", so that the irrationality of human behavior in its loves and hates, desires and aversions, follies and jealousies is really the expression of a conscious or unconscious thrust toward internal harmony.

The parallels to Freud's "libido" are even more apparent. Both the "existential imperative" and the "libido" are based upon a universal thrust towards self-realization. Both reduce all problems of conduct to the elementary necessities of this thrust. And both, if frustrated in their urge, will give indications of this in the conscious life of man.

The following contrasts will show the originality and place of Kierkegaard's imperative: Descartes and Hegel had found the reality of man in the imperative nature of reason, Kant had found it in the imperative demand of the moral self. Kierkegaard found it at a more fundamental level--the imperative nature of existence, the existential imperative to be. Man is not merely an animal who makes concepts or moral maxims, laughter, tools and gods. He is above all a being who makes himself. He alone is burdened with ontological responsibility, for his absolute interest is, How to become himself.<sup>89</sup>

This ingenious manner of describing the structure of man was a completely new approach even though it must be said at the same time that it did not spring up from nowhere. But while Kierkegaard clearly learned from thinkers like Spinoza, Schelling, Hegel, and Kant, his definition of man is based on categories of his own. Now it might be asked and must be asked in what way this definition differs from others and whether it is not of the same general and a priori character as, amongst others, Hegel's views?

---

<sup>89</sup>Price, op. cit., p. 42.



Kierkegaard claimed that he had derived his categories from man himself and thus avoided the pitfalls of those who attempted to define man from some perspective of particular interest to them (i.e. economical man, rational man, religious man). Such ad hoc definitions failed to solve many of the unique problems man posed and could not lay hold of the elusive self. After all, Kant had already pointed to the difficulty of meaningfully grasping such elusive and fleeting a thing as self-consciousness, which is both subject and object to itself. He attacked empiricists and rationalists of his day for dealing with the self as a substance, a thing with attributes of its own. Thus he proceeded to deny any reality to the empirical self. It was noumenal, its realm that of pure possibility, but it was unknowable, even though the source of all knowledge. Kant, of course, got out of this impossible position by postulating the "moral self" whose functions could be known and from whose reality one could arrive at conclusions about its own nature, the world, and God.

Kierkegaard, recognizing the force of Kant's insights into the paradoxical nature of the self, thus strove to and succeeded in hammering out a formula that would stress the self as possibility and fact, as contingent as well as concrete, and which would be able to do justice to each particular individual and yet be true of all men.

However, instead of giving an a priori definition, he attempted to describe human nature in an empirical way. Thus it is in order now to enquire as to the findings which support his definition. Kierkegaard answers in one word: Dread.

We must turn now to an examination of the study The Concept of





Dread, a study whose originality and significance has been underlined by the writings of philosophers and psychologists of the twentieth century.

#### B. How To Discuss Original Sin

The subtitle of Kierkegaard's essay The Concept of Dread reads "a simple psychological deliberation oriented in the direction of the dogmatic problem of original sin". It was his opinion that of all the answers that have been proposed to the question of why man goes wrong and commits evil the only realistic answer was the Christian one which spoke of sin. Consequently, the concept of sin constituted for Kierkegaard the great divide that separates Christianity from all forms of humanism both ancient and modern. But even the Christian answer must remain wholly inadequate unless it can explain how sin began and why an act of sin is done. So far theologians have only been able to suggest worthless tautologies because they consistently failed to take account of a single decisive factor behind sin upon which he had come in the experiences of his own life and by the study of the lives and experiences of other people.

Thus the essay is given to the task of discussing the doctrine of original sin in such a way as to make it intelligible, yet without reducing it to something else or explaining it away so that the whole doctrine disappears. In order to attack this problem he had first of all to clear a space, to find a discipline of the human mind in which the discussion could take place without being self-defeating.

Kierkegaard asserts that the discussion can not take place within the realm of modern philosophy, that is the school of Hegel, because here endless confusion has come about by the method of introducing various



time-honored Christian words (reconciliation for example) into epistemology and logic, all in the name of going further than Christianity. But what is gained by talking about the identity of the knowing subject and the thing known as a reconciliation?

That thought possesses reality was the assumption of all ancient philosophy as well as of the philosophy of the Middle Ages. With Kant this assumption became doubtful. Suppose now that the Hegelian school had really thought through Kant's scepticism... and then reconstructed the earlier view in a higher form, in such a wise that thought does not possess reality by virtue of a pre-supposition--is then this consciously produced reality of thought a reconciliation? In fact philosophy is merely brought back to the point where in old days one began, in the old days when precisely the word "reconciliation" had immense significance.<sup>90</sup>

And when in addition to this Hegelians hint that logic is properly the doctrine about the logos and when they have introduced "movement" into logic by means of the dynamic of the "negative", and when finally in the Hegelian ethics the "negative" turns out to be also the "evil", the result will be "that language will presumably have to celebrate a great sabbatical year in which we let speech and thought rest in order to be able to begin with the beginning".<sup>91</sup> Thus one can not discuss original sin within the confines of philosophy which has become either over-refined paganism or sheer confusion.

Again, ethics as the science of the ideal is also unfit for this discussion. To the ideal, sin and original sin constitute only a stubborn obstacle.

As all ancient thought and speculation were founded upon the assumption that thought had reality, so all ancient ethics upon the assumption that virtue is realizable. Scepticism

---

<sup>90</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, pp. 10-11.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 11.





of sin is entirely foreign to paganism. For the ethical consciousness, sin is what an error is in relation to knowledge, it is the particular exception which proves nothing.<sup>92</sup>

That leaves psychology, a science concerned with human nature. Perhaps sin and original sin can be discussed as something in human nature. This is what Kierkegaard proposes to do, with the warning, however, that even psychology is not properly oriented to deal with sin. The danger here is that psychology would "explain it away" by putting it in the same class with any number of other characteristics of human nature, thus making it unavoidable, something for which man can not be held responsible. The only thing psychology can really do in order to lead into the proper direction is to describe some attribute of human nature which makes sin possible but not necessary. While sin and original sin are concepts that belong properly to dogmatics, dogmatics can not discuss them psychologically because it can not allow itself to be disinterested and neutral in its investigation. Dogmatics posits sin, but in the same breath it posits it as the thing to be condemned, the thing to be avoided. Thus its attitude can only be polemical. The discussion then must take place on the borderline between psychology and dogmatics, the psychological treatment proceeding "in such a way that it has 'in mente' and before its eye the dogma of original sin".<sup>93</sup>

It is important to note here that Kierkegaard hints already at the relation of dread and sin. While psychology may be able to study

---

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 13.





dread empirically, it must, if it is to be understood correctly, be interpreted theologically.

### C. The Fall From Innocence

The task Kierkegaard set himself, then, was to define and describe that property or attitude of human nature, of the human psychological structure, out of which sin could appear as the "qualitative leap", that is to say, not by a casual necessity, as if sin were already inherent or immanent in the antecedent condition, but by a sort of "bad freedom", or "free fall", so that the sin appears as the new and emergent quality, not predictable and not determined in terms of antecedent conditions alone.

Such a property or attitude must have above all the character of ambiguity, being in itself neither good nor bad but capable of going in either direction, and it must be tied up with the specifically human structure. It must not be a characteristic that man shares with the animals to any extent, such as fear or anger. This characteristic Kierkegaard found in a psychological state or condition which he described as an insidious, objectless anxiousness which shadows every man, a feeling of fear which does not apply to anything definite and which both frightens and fascinates at the same time. To express this psychological condition he used the Danish word "Angest" or the German equivalent "Angst". Unfortunately, in order to get the full connotations of that word one needs a whole collection of words in the English language. The word "anxiety" has been suggested by Tillich amongst other thinkers. But it is really too precise an expression for Kierkegaard's vague, shadowing foreboding not quite conscious enough to become fear. Walter Lowrie, the translator of



so many of Kierkegaard's works, decided to use the word "dread" after he had searched in vain for something better. For the sake of uniformity with the quotations from Lowrie's translations "dread" will be used in this chapter. In the subsequent parts of this paper "dread" and "anxiety" are used synonymously. But it must be kept in mind that Kierkegaard means much more than both of the English terms suggest.

It is then the concept of dread which must be understood in its relation to the total structure of the human person if one is to make sense out of the dogma of original sin and the Genesis account describing how sin came into the world.

The nature of original sin has often been examined, and yet the principal category has been missing--it is dread, that is what really determines it; for dread is a desire for what one fears, a sympathetic antipathy; dread is an alien power which takes hold of the individual, and yet one can not extricate oneself from it, does not wish to, because one is afraid, but what one fears attracts one. Dread renders the individual powerless and the first sin always happens in a moment of weakness; it therefore lacks any apparent accountableness, but that want is the real snare.<sup>94</sup>

The Genesis story of the Fall, which appealed to Kierkegaard as the perpetual story of man, was significant to him not as an account of what happened once upon a time, but of what happens to all men. Adam is not only the "first" man and the representative man, he is also the representative of every succeeding man as the "first" man, that is, as one who must begin at the beginning. To himself, every man is the first man, in addition to being merely a representative of the human race, and if the event of being human happens to him at all, it will happen to him as

---

<sup>94</sup>Journals, #402.





it did to Adam and as it does to every other man. Whatever explains how sin originates in each man must therefore explain Adam, and vice versa.

To explain Adam's sin is therefore to explain original sin, and no explanation is of any avail which explains original sin and does not explain Adam. The deepest reason for this is to be discovered in the essential characteristic of human existence, that man is an individual and as such is at once himself and the whole race, in such wise that the whole race has part in the individual, and the individual has part in the whole race.<sup>95</sup>

The difficulty about understanding original sin is that a quality is posited, sinfulness, which seems to presuppose itself, and yet it is out of a state of innocence that the first sin emerges. The first sin then bears the weight of being not only a sin, but of being also that by which the quality of sinfulness first comes into the world. And this is precisely the case in Adam and in every subsequent man.

With the first sin came sin into the world. Exactly in the same way is this true of every subsequent first sin of man, that with it sin comes into the world. The fact that it was not there before Adam's first sin is (in relation to sin itself) an altogether accidental and irrelevant reflection which has altogether no significance, and is no justification for making Adam's sin greater or the first sin of every other man less.<sup>96</sup>

It is useless, for example, to try to make Adam's sin appear more awful by eulogizing the state of innocence in which he lived, painting poetic fancies about the Garden of Eden and the state of rapport that existed between Adam and nature, Adam and Eve, Adam and God. This would only appear to exonerate the first sin of every subsequent man, for he is born into no such paradise. Kierkegaard objects to the tendency of

---

<sup>95</sup>Concept of Dread, p. 26.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 28.



nineteenth century theology to identify innocence with immediacy and then to add, Hegel-wise, that it is the characteristic of immediacy to be annulled (aufgehoben), for this obscures the fact that when innocence is "annulled", it is "annulled" by the guilt of sin and not by a "characteristic of immediacy". In fact, innocence is not immediacy whose destiny it is to be annulled, and one should not yearn wistfully for the recovery of its imagined perfection, for as soon as it is lost a different kind of perfection is the goal of man. To wish for innocence is therefore a waste of time and a new guilt as well as a means of obscuring the real situation of man.

The account in Genesis gives also the right explanation of innocence. This is by no means the pure being of immediacy, but it is ignorance. The fact that ignorance regarded from without seems as though designed to become knowledge is entirely irrelevant to ignorance.<sup>97</sup>

This ignorance, which is the primal ignorance, could very well endure as a state. So one need not be in such indecent haste to get it annulled. It is far better to ask what the spiritual state of man is in the condition of ignorance which is the primal innocence. Kierkegaard's psychological view of man as stated earlier is that man is a synthesis of the bodily and the soulish, the synthesis being constantly performed in and by a third factor, the spirit. This view appears to have something in common with that of psychoanalytic psychology, for the latter regards man as a psychosomatic entity and distinguishes in that entity a single factor responsible for the conscious integration of the total experience.

---

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 34.





This factor, variously called the ego, the self, or the ego as it is influenced in later life by the self-ideal or the super-ego, would correspond to Kierkegaard's "spirit", and the psychosomatic experiences, the raw materials which it tries to integrate, to Kierkegaard's "bodily-soulsh" factors. In the state of ignorance which is the primal innocence, the spirit is not yet awake and functioning, but it is there in a state of dreaming about itself as a possibility without becoming a reality yet.

In this state there is peace and repose; but at the same time there is something different, which is not dissension and strife, for there is nothing to strive with. What is it then? Nothing. But what effect does nothing produce? It begets dread. This is the profound secret of innocence, that at the same time it is dread.<sup>98</sup>

At this point, the author of The Concept of Dread feels that he must remind the reader that dread is not to be confounded with fear and similar concepts which refer to something definite. Rather, dread is the reality of "freedom as possibility anterior to possibility."<sup>99</sup> One does not therefore find dread in the beast, precisely for the reason that by nature the beast is not qualified by spirit. "Freedom as possibility anterior to possibility" points to the fact that if man is to become a creature that has more than one possibility or what is called "freedom to choose between alternatives", there must be a structure of sufficient complexity to permit several alternative actions. It is just this structure, this "presence of several possibilities" which gives rise to dread in relation to the future. If there were only one possibility,

---

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 38.





there would be nothing to worry about, nothing either to avoid or to attain, a state of blissful unconcern usually assumed to be present in animals. But man, even in his most animal-like condition is not only an animal. He cannot escape feeling his destiny to become free and to be spirit, even if he feels it only as dread or anxiousness for the future that both beckons and repels. "Dread is a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy".<sup>100</sup>

That dread is not only encountered as an unvaryingly unpleasant experience is seen by the eagerness with which children lap up "dreadful" stories and with which both children and adults pursue the thrills of chase and horror in the theater and the movie. Such indulgence for an adult already has a certain element of guilt in it, which is either acknowledged or is waived aside for the sake of the catharsis or the recreation achieved. Thus Kierkegaard writes:

The dread which is posited in innocence is, in the first place, not guilt; in the second place, it is not a heavy burden, not a suffering which cannot be brought into harmony with the felicity of innocence. If we observe children, we find this dread more definitely indicated as a seeking after adventure, a thirst for the prodigious, the mysterious. The fact that there are children in whom this is not found proves nothing, for neither in the beast does it exist, and the less spirit the less dread. This dread belongs to the child so essentially that it cannot do without it; even though it alarms him, it captivates him nevertheless by its sweet feeling of apprehension.<sup>101</sup>

This ambiguity of dread is just what makes it the correct psychological antecedent for sin, especially for the first sin. It does not

---

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 38.



explain sin by predetermining it, but it sets the stage for it.

Innocence has now reached its apex. It is ignorance, but not an animal brutality, but an ignorance which is qualified by spirit, but which precisely is dread, because its ignorance is about nothing. Here there is no knowledge of good and evil, etc., but the whole reality of knowledge is projected in dread as the immense nothing of ignorance.<sup>102</sup>

When Adam hears the prohibition about eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, it must be assumed that to him the prohibition is an enigmatic one requiring only obedience rather than understanding, since only after eating of it could he understand what good is or what evil is. This consideration discredits the interpretation that it was the prohibition itself that tempted him to desire the fruit, for he does not even know what freedom is, or what disobedience is.

The prohibition alarms Adam (induces a state of dread) because the prohibition awakens in him the possibility of freedom. . . the alarming possibility of being able. What it is he is able to do, of that he has no conception.<sup>103</sup>

Similarly, of the threatened punishment, "thou shalt surely die", Adam, like a child, has no conception, only the vague notion that it must be something terrible.

The terrible becomes in this instance merely dread; for Adam has not understood what was said, and here again we have only the ambiguity of dread. The infinite possibility of being able draws closer for the fact that this possibility indicates a possibility as its consequence.<sup>104</sup>

Then comes the fall, not the possible but the actual fall, which

---

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 41.





psychology does not explain (unless it were to be considered an explanation to say that whatever is possible must become actual, which is not true even in nature). The fall results in the fact that two qualities enter the world, sinfulness and sexuality. Sexuality is something other than sexual differentiation, which the animals have and which man in the state of innocence has, but in ignorance of sexuality. Sexuality is sexual differentiation as a problem for the spirit, for man can not have sex as the animals have it, a blind vital instinct. Adam and Eve discover sexuality and shame or modesty in the same instant, and sew themselves aprons. As soon as the spirit is there, the ego in its integrating function, the entire psychosomatic spectrum becomes a task for the spirit to integrate into itself, and sexuality represents the extreme of sensuousness that must be taken into account by spirit. And, as soon as sin is present, sensuousness takes on a dread-inducing quality which of course it did not have when man was in innocence, because now there is the anxious consciousness that sensuousness may become sin, and this dread applies most of all to sexuality as the extreme of sensuousness.

It is not quite clear from Kierkegaard's writings in what relation dread and sexuality stand. Sexuality is for him the most extreme form of sensuousness. But although he rejects the view that the sensual itself is sinful, he says that sensuality was degraded to sinfulness with the fall and thus took on a dread-inducing quality. On the basis of what he says about sexuality it seems that it was indeed sinful for him and needed to be overcome. Evidently, he shared the negative views of his age on this point. However, his view of sexuality is of little importance for his interpretation of dread.



#### D. The Snowballing Effect

The difference between Adam and every subsequent man is best characterized by the incremental character of dread. Dread grows. As soon as sinfulness enters the world, whether by the symbolic first sin of Adam or by the actual first sin (undoubtedly lost or repressed by childhood memory) of the subsequent man, dread is increased both in strength and in the new consciousness of dread which sin itself brings with it, that is the anxiety in the face of new possibilities that having sinned implies by way of guilt or punishment or continuance in evil. This may be called the snowballing effect of dread. Because of this effect, the later individual is born into a different kind of world from that of the earlier individual. It is a world in which sinfulness has already acquired considerable power in its permeation of the entire human situation, including all man-to-man, man-to-God, and man-to-nature relationships, and therefore a world in which dread has increased correspondingly in strength and consciousness. This of course is what it means to be an individual participating in the history of the race. By this fact the whole world, creation itself, takes on a different significance by dint of the fact that sin has entered it and continues to enter it through the acts of men, and that dread is increased. Kierkegaard says that to discuss this what he calls objective effect of dread is not the business of psychology because it is really an assertion of dogmatics. Nevertheless, he makes use of Rom. 8:19 to show that Scripture is aware of the situation. There the "anxious longing of creation" is mentioned, and, says Kierkegaard, "if there can properly be any question of anxious





longing, it follows as a matter of course that the creation is in a state of imperfection."<sup>105</sup> It is as if the entry of sin into the world through man, of this freedom that is a misuse of freedom "cast over the whole creation a reflection of possibility and a shudder of complicity. . ."<sup>106</sup>

Surely this dread in the creation can rightly be called an objective dread. It was not produced by the creation but was produced by the fact that it is seen in an entirely different light which was shed upon it when by Adam's first sin sensuality was degraded to signify sinfulness and is constantly so degraded in so far as sin continues to come into the world.<sup>107</sup>

This interpretation, however, "parries the rationalistic view that the sensual itself is sinful. After sin has come into the world, and every time sin comes into the world, the sensuality becomes sinful; but what becomes was not beforehand what it became."<sup>108</sup> From this complicity and blame the creation longs to be delivered, a deliverance promised in the doctrine of the atonement. As Paul goes on to say in Rom. 8:22-24,

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

About such a promise psychology as such can have nothing to say. It can only discuss dread as a precursor of sin.

On the subjective side the increment of dread, which is the difference between the earlier and the later individual, shows itself as

---

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., pp. 52-53.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 53.





the increase in the self-consciousness of dread, that is, dread becoming more aware of itself as dread in the individual and more aware that the nothing of dread might be a definite something. There may even be conscious attempts to deal with the dread by getting it to pass over into a definite fear of a specific object, and then to deal with this fear by means of courageous and intelligent action. There is, for instance, the time-honored priestly function of channeling the tribe's diffuse dread into fear of the gods, who can then be propitiated by appropriate acts. The well-known fact that action affords a temporary relief from the gnawing of dread is what transforms the permanent anxiousness inherent in the very structure of man into a temptation to action at any cost, even the guilty action. But this temptation is no exoneration for man. Dread, even in its incremental historical form, is still not yet guilt, nor can it be said to push men into guilt.

Therefore, even though the dread become more and more reflective, the guilt which breaks forth in dread by the qualitative leap retains nevertheless the same accountability as that of Adam, and dread retains the same ambiguity.<sup>109</sup>

Meanwhile, the greater reflective consciousness of dread there is, the more it seems as if the "nothing" of dread could be pinned down to a definite something. In fact, it can be pinned down to something fairly definite, but even then it retains the characteristic of negativity which makes it both elusive and threatening. Imagine a man faced with the task to make a decision which would bring about this or that action. It is important, first of all, that one should not define man's freedom moralistically as the freedom to decide between good and evil. Such a view is

---

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 54.



much too narrow and ignores both the complexity and ambiguity of existence. It is very rare that a situation calling for action presents only two clear-cut alternatives, one good and one bad. Freedom is the "being able" of man, the "having possibility". The more freedom, the more dread, because the more possibility. Why should this be so? Why should not freedom glory in its possibilities, the more the better, instead of being delivered by them into dread? Because, says Kierkegaard, there is another side to man, his finitude, which is just as real and just as deserving of consideration as his freedom.

A man deciding on an action is faced with two opposite fears of "nothing" whose combined effect on him increase the anxious tension between his freedom and his finitude. On the one hand, there is the dread that, in actualizing certain possibilities, he may jeopardize his own future, not to mention his life itself, by the unpredictable reality he thus brings into being. The "nothing" here stands for the unknown, especially the unknown as his own future which he by his own act brings upon himself. On the other hand, there is the dread that by not actualizing certain possibilities he is limiting his own stature as a person, he is frustrating the freedom that is in him and wants to realize itself in action. Here the "nothing" stands for frustration, limitation, the dwarfing or crippling of the self. The dread about the first nothing, the unknown, holds him in indecision and checks action. But the dread about the second nothing, the restriction of selfhood, tends to drive him out of indecision into action and therefore back into the clutches of the first nothing, the fear of the unknown. The first dread is the expression





of his finitude, his inability to foresee and determine all the consequences of his act, while the second dread is the expression of his freedom, which feels itself frustrated and contradicted when possibilities are not realized. That the action which finally does break out of this mounting tension could easily be one which the man himself considers a wrong act is easily understandable in psychological terms. But in ethical terms it is no exoneration for man, for he himself, the freedom in him, acknowledges after he has recovered from such an attack of dread that he need not have succumbed. Kierkegaard describes this situation in a now almost classical passage:

One may liken dread to dizziness. He whose eye chances to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But the reason for it is just as much his eye as it is the precipice. For suppose he had not looked down. Thus dread is the dizziness of freedom which occurs when the spirit would posit the synthesis, and freedom then gazes down into its own possibility, grasping at finiteness to sustain itself. In this dizziness freedom succumbs. Further than this psychology can not go and will not. That very instant everything is changed, and when freedom rises again it sees that it is guilty. Between these two instants lies the leap, which no science has explained or can explain. He who becomes guilty in dread becomes an ambiguously guilty as it is possible to be. Dread is a womanish debility in which freedom swoons. Psychologically speaking, the fall into sin always occurs in impotence. But dread is at the same time the most egoistic thing, and no concrete expression of freedom is so egoistic as is the possibility of every concretion. This again is the overwhelming experience which determines the individual's ambiguous relation, both sympathetic and anti-pathetic. In dread there is the egoistic infinity of possibility, which does not tempt like a definite choice, but alarms and fascinates with its sweet anxiety.<sup>110</sup>

Nevertheless, dread is the expression of the spiritual stature of

---

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 55.



the advance that human nature has made over animal nature, at whatever cost in the way of emotional and mental struggle. Dread may be called the pervasive condition which makes man aware that his exile from nature is a consequence of having gone beyond nature, beyond the Eden-like existence of the animals. To say this is not to romanticize the animals. Certainly the animals experience fear, and we know that they have specific fear-reactions built into their nervous systems. But as far as we know an animal does not experience dread over the fact that by its actions it may become something less than an animal, or fail to be the best animal of its kind, or be tempted to become something more than an animal. All this is reserved for man in relation to what it means to be a man. Freedom brings with it a responsibility toward existence which is felt by man both as a dread of failure to do the best with it and as a temptation to do something fantastic with it, "the egoistic infinity of possibility", both of which spell the end of the innocent ignorance and irresponsibility of animals and children. Once the possibility of spirit is there, it will give man no peace, and precisely this "no peace" is dread. His only hope is a different kind of happiness from that of animals and children, in the perfection of spirit.

The snowballing effect of dread, the "more" of it in the historically later individual, is due as much to the increased spiritual awareness of the dangers that threaten spirit as it is to the accumulation of knowledge of good and evil in the world. Thus the knowledge that sensuousness may become sinfulness creates a dread of sexuality, because of the intensity of the erotic in it. It is as though the spirit, as soon





as it realizes that its task is to synthesize or integrate the psychic and the somatic, would like to make things easier for itself by somehow getting rid of the most obstreperous vitality at the somatic end of the spectrum, that is, sexuality. For example, Kierkegaard thought that in the foremost representatives of the Greek view the presence of sexuality in man was felt as an embarrassment. In spite of the cult of beauty and of the body, the strategy of Greek rationalism was to draw men's eros away from these merely physical manifestations to the heavenly or intellectual originals of beauty, and to woo men away from acting according to passion toward acting according to reason. It struck the Greeks as a contradiction that man, who is destined for the life of reason, should nevertheless have sexuality, or, since he has it, that he should take it seriously. "Hence the highest pagan expression is that the erotic is the comical."<sup>111</sup> By attacking sexuality with the weapon of irony, thereby making it seem ridiculous, the Greek rationalist expressed his perception of it as a threat to the spirit, and at the same time made it a scapegoat on which to lay the blame for the failure of man to live by the light of reason. It was the animal passions that blinded and overpowered men. Hence the Greek rationalists did not take either marriage and women very seriously for fear of making themselves ridiculous.

On the other hand, in Christianity the spirit tries to make things easier for itself either by declaring through an ethical misunderstanding that the sexual itself is sinful or by appealing prematurely to the state

---

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 62.





of spiritual perfection when sex will make no difference.

Here the erotic is not ironically neutralized but suspended because it is the tendency of Christianity to lead the spirit further. When in bashfulness the spirit is in dread and fear of arraying itself in the generic difference, the individual suddenly leaps away, and instead of penetrating it ethically grasps an explanation drawn from the highest sphere of spirit. This is one side of the monastic view, whether that is more particularly characterized as ethical rigorism or as a life in which contemplation is predominant.<sup>112</sup>

Monasticism assumes that in the spirit sex makes no difference, yet it spends so much of its energy striving against sex that finally sex takes on the meaning of sinfulness. The fact is that Christianity does define spirit in its perfection, that is to say, in its infinity, as a state in which sexuality is absent.

A perfect spirit cannot be conceived as sexually differentiated. This is in harmony with the doctrine of the Church concerning the character of the resurrection, in harmony with its notion of angels, in harmony with the dogmatic definitions of the persons of Christ.<sup>113</sup>

But it is no use pretending that sex is not there, and no use for the spirit to try to make its job easier by such evasions or such wish-projections onto the present of a future state of perfection.

Once the sexual is posited as the extreme point of the synthesis, it is no use ignoring it. The task is of course to win it into conformity with the destiny of the spirit. (Here lies all the moral problems of the erotic.) The realization of this task is the triumph of love in a man in whom the spirit has triumphed in such a way that the sexual is forgotten and only remembered in forgetfulness. When this has come about, then sensuousness is transfigured into spirit and dread driven out.<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 63-64.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 71-72.



### E. The Anatomy of Dread

As history goes on, the "nothing" which is the object of dread achieves a variety of concrete expressions that represent attitudes of freedom toward that which is dreaded, attitudes not only of individuals but of whole peoples and more or less whole cultures. Thus the Greeks can be characterized in their general cosmic attitude as being in dread of fate. Fate was for them the "nothing" of dread, it was a combination of necessity and chance whose spokesman is the oracle. The Greek had to consult the oracle, knowing its utterance would be just as ambiguous as dread is and as fate is, being one moment necessity, the next moment chance.

In this fact lies the profound and inexplicable tragic of paganism. The tragic, however, does not lie in the fact that the utterance of the oracle is ambiguous, but in the fact that the pagan could not forbear to take counsel of it. He is in relation to it and dare not refrain from consulting it.<sup>115</sup>

But it is just the hypostatizing of chance and necessity in the idea of fate that prevents the concept of guilt and sin from emerging in proper form in paganism. This is corroborated by the fact, or rather the contradiction, that in paganism it is possible to become guilty by fate, as in the Oedipus legend or as in the explanation of the "flow" in the character of a great man by means of the frivolous notion of the jealousy of the gods. For guilt and sin to emerge as distinctive concepts there must first be the idea of the single individual and his accountability as a single individual. Nothing in the nature of the world or of the past,

---

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., p. 87.





nothing in the very nature of things, must be permitted to obscure the individual's significance in this respect if guilt is to assume its deepest meaning for the spiritual life of man.

The Oriental religions deal with this situation in a way that is not basically different from the Greek way, although it may seem so superficially. Instead of doing away with guilt directly by means of fate, they do away with the individual; for them to be individual is the basic guilt of man, and yet it is also his fate. The Jews, on the other hand, had the right conception of guilt as presupposing the accountable individual and as presupposing even the accountable nation, composed of such individuals. Judaism had the Law, defining that for which Judaism was held accountable, and in Judaism therefore the cosmic negativity of dread took on the form of being in dread by becoming guilty under the Law. The Jew knew what he had to do, knew that he would sooner or later fail and become guilty, knew that he needed help (but not whether it would come), and so he resorted to the concept of sacrifice and, more significantly, to the repeated sacrifice by the priestly cult.

To the oracle of paganism corresponds the sacrifice of Judaism. . . The Jew has resource to the sacrifice but that is of no help to him, for what properly must help him would be that the relation of dread was annulled (*aufgehoben*) and a real relation posited. Inasmuch as this does not come to pass, the sacrifice becomes ambiguous, a fact which is expressed by its repetition, a further consequence of which would be a pure scepticism with respect to the act of sacrifice itself.<sup>116</sup>

Surely such scepticism about the efficacy of a sacrifice that must

---

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 93.



continually be repeated is at least part of the ground for the prophetic protest in the Old Testament against priestly elaboration of the sacrificial ceremonial, and the looking forward to a Messiah who would come and redeem his people. However, such a redemption is not to be had for the wishing; it must wait upon the incarnation. But when the incarnation comes, it posits guilt as sin, and "only with sin is atonement posited; and its sacrifice is not repeated."<sup>117</sup>

With Christianity it would then seem that the great negativity, the "nothing" which is the object of dread, must be sin. And this is true. Christianity does require the individual to be in remorse over every particular sin and in dread of entering into new sin. But Christianity also brings something with it that makes it just as sinful to wallow in dread and remorse as it is to be devoid of dread and sin entirely--and that is the forgiveness of sins. Ethically, what is demanded of the individual is a positive act, and, because there is a proper dread of sin and error, every act must be undertaken in "fear and trembling". But if dread should try to get the upper hand, to paralyze the person with anticipated possible sins and future remorse, forgiveness stands by with its proffered help to break the spell of dread. The tendency to wallow voluptuously and self-importantly in remorse, a tendency by which dread of sin attempts to enthrall and debilitate the individual, is analogous to the aforementioned tendency of egoistic freedom to wallow voluptuously in possibility. Now if the individual will not help himself by means of the

---

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., p. 93.





proffered forgiveness and thus drive dread away in each case through a positive action grounded in faith, Christianity then charges him with taking the atonement in vain and making light of the forgiveness of sins. And, when, in spite of all, the individual still persists in not letting himself be helped, then we have the beginning of something quite the opposite of the dread of sin, we have the dread of the good, the possession of the spirit from below, the demonic.

The demonic has its own varieties and nuances of expression, arising from the many different ways in which freedom can be lost after it has been partially established in the synthesizing function of the spirit. In the demonic mode of experience a part of the person separates itself from the rest and goes over to the enemy, maintaining its strength and rebellion precisely by the amount of unfreedom it can cause in the still-integrated part of the person.

Kierkegaard presents a catalogue of symptoms that would now be called the signs of neuroticism, listing them under two general headings--freedom lost somatic--psychically, and freedom lost pneumatically, that is, in the spirit itself. Under the first heading he gives such examples of compulsive behavior as "an exaggerated sensibility, an exaggerated irritability, nervous affections, hysteria, hypochondria, etc. . ."<sup>118</sup> Under the second heading he places all those spiritual sins which are expressions of the fact that the person is not willing to live out the truth with his whole being.

---

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., p. 122.





The content of freedom, intellectually regarded, is the truth which makes man free. Put precisely for this reason is truth in such a sense the work of freedom that it is constantly engaged in producing truth. . . truth exists for the particular individual only as he himself produces it in action.<sup>119</sup>

If he is not willing to do this, it means that some part of him is in an unfree relation to the truth, is in dread of the good that the truth might bring about in him or through him in action. And to the extent that he is in dread of the good he is demonic. The correct expression for the relationship between the demonic and truth is found in James 2:19: "Even the demons believe--and shudder". Thus the demonic in man, as the secret dread of the good, is able to express itself in such quite ordinary traits as

indolence, putting the thing off till another time, as curiosity which comes to nothing more than curiosity, as dishonest self-deception, as effeminate softness which relies upon others, as an affectation of aristocratic indifference, as stupid bustle, etc.<sup>120</sup>

Most pervasively, the demonic expresses itself as a kind of misplaced levity, an absence of seriousness about oneself just at the point of inwardness where, if seriousness is missing, all else is meaningless.

Everyone who has lost inwardness can with good reason say, "The wine of life is drawn!" and can say too, "There's nothing serious in mortality, all is but toys"; for inwardness is precisely the fountain which springeth up into eternal life, and what issues from this fountain is precisely seriousness.<sup>121</sup>

---

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., p. 130.



The man who laughs off the thought of eternity as "taking oneself too seriously" is in dread of the good; he does not want to let the good get its grapnel hooks into him, he easily finds a hundred ways of escape-- and just this is the bondage of the demonic, that by his own "free" act he continually escapes the good.

When faith is present, dread is not abolished but is dealt with, in each case, in a positive, faith-grounded way. To abolish dread, that deep anxiousness which is the symptom of his responsibility toward existence, would be to abolish the spiritual structure of man, to make him either an angel or a beast. But when faith is present, dread is not allowed to become neurotic, to debilitate the man, to get him in its power to the point of making him impotent.

And, more positively, when faith is present, dread is used educatively by the individual to apprise himself of his real situation, of the possibilities that are closed to him as well as those that are open, those that are a waste of effort to worry about and those that could easily be much worse than they are. All these educative aspects of dread are brought out in the long "be not anxious" passage in Matthew 6.

But to use dread educatively one must be honest toward existence, that is, one must be willing to acknowledge the terrible as well as the wonderful possibilities in it instead of complaining about life because it does not consist of the wonderful possibilities only.

When such a person, therefore, goes out from the school of possibility, and knows more thoroughly than a child knows the alphabet that he can demand of life absolutely nothing, and that terror, perdition, annihilation, dwell next door to every man, and has learned the profitable lesson that every dread which alarms. . . may the next instant become a fact, he





will then interpret reality differently, he will extol reality, and even when it rests upon him heavily he will remember that after all it is far, far lighter than the possibility was.<sup>122</sup>

#### F. Summary

We need to briefly summarize the main points of this study which established Kierkegaard as "one of the most remarkable psychologists of all time, in depth, if not in breadth, superior to Nietzsche, and in penetration comparable only to Dostoievski".<sup>123</sup> One can only marvel that Kierkegaard despite the lack of adequate tools for the interpretation of unconscious phenomena, which have only been available since Freud, was able to profoundly anticipate modern psychological insights into dread.

Sin, then, to Kierkegaard is what separates man from God and therefore what also separates him from becoming what he ought to become. It is important here, in order to understand him fully, to get rid of the moralistic notion that sin is either evil deeds done by a few evil criminals or some naughty deeds committed by everybody. Sin can only be understood in relation to God. It is meaningless except in a context in which God is made explicit. If sin is "talked about as a sickness, an abnormality, a poison, a disharmony",<sup>124</sup> it has already been subverted.

Sin is the condition of every actual man before God. Yet it is not an automatic accompaniment of man's humanness. The critical questions Kierkegaard posed, therefore, were: How does sin get started? What is

---

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>123</sup>Werner Brock, Contemporary German Philosophy, p. 75.

<sup>124</sup>Concept of Dread, p. 14.



the prototype of sin? Whether the question is asked about the human race or about the human individual, what is the "original sin"? As he himself put the problem, "The first sin is a determinant of quality, the first sin is the sin".<sup>125</sup> What happens when this first sin takes place?

Kierkegaard answers that the prototypical sin comes about through dread. Dread is the recognition of "the reality of freedom as possibility anterior to possibility".<sup>126</sup> So long as man is in a state of innocence in which his spirit is dreaming he can not be said to be either sinful or free. But once he begins to look at his true situation as a human being, continuation of the ignorant innocence is no longer possible. He sees that his freedom is real, that it contains possibility or potentiality but no marked course. Therefore, he bears responsibility for what is done with his freedom. This is the wakening of the spirit from his dreaming.

In describing this encounter with the "possibility anterior to possibility" Kierkegaard talked of the "abyss", suggesting that this is what man looks at. He spoke of "dizziness" to connote man's feelings while looking at it. It might be useful to recall some of his words here.

One may liken dread to dizziness. He whose eye chances to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But the reason for it is just as much his eye as it is the precipice.<sup>127</sup>

In other words, the very act of looking shows the viewer that he has already made some choice within the whole range of possibility. It is at this

---

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., p. 55.



point that freedom gazes down into its own possibility and in this dizziness freedom succumbs. The awareness that one has already made some choice because he has looked down makes him realize, in a more general sense, that he is a choice-making creature whether he wants to be one or not. He is like a man in a car who has just successfully avoided a bad crash by going into the ditch and who retrospectively realizes the extent and significance of his choice as he did not at the moment of crisis. And when this general point is projected into the future, with all its implications for all the responsibility of all the choices yet to be made, then in dizziness freedom succumbs.

To Kierkegaard, freedom and dread are two sides of the same coin. To look seriously at freedom is to confront the infinity of possibility, "which does not tempt like a definite choice, but alarms and fascinates".<sup>128</sup> It is the quality connoted by alarm and fascination which makes one dizzy. And in view of the real nature of this alarm plus fascination, one ought to feel dizzy when he confronts it. No wonder that one is always gravely tempted to try to avoid dizziness. If it is possible to succeed in denying that the possibility is really as wide as it is or that there is responsibility for decisions about it or that there is genuine freedom, or that there is guilt if freedom is used wrongly, then one can avoid direct and painful feelings of dizziness. But the result is only what Kierkegaard called the "dread of the good", or in modern terms, neurotic anxiety. This "dread of the good" is a more constrictive and uncreative

---

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., p. 55.





form of "normal" dread, which is caused by the individual's failure to move ahead in situations of "normal" dread. It is Kierkegaard's conviction that for the realization of selfhood one must move ahead and face the dizziness of choice.

So it is too that in the eyes of the world it is dangerous to venture. And why? Because one may lose. But not to venture is shrewd. And yet, by not venturing, it is so dreadfully easy to lose that which it would be difficult to lose even in the most venturesome venture, and in any case never so easily, so completely as if it were nothing. . . . one's self. For if I have ventured amiss--very well, then life helps me by its punishment. But if I have not ventured at all--who then helps me? And, moreover, if by not venturing at all in the highest sense (and to venture in the highest sense is precisely to become conscious of oneself) I have gained all earthly advantages. . . and lose myself! What of that?"<sup>129</sup>

If there is no freedom, there can be no sin. And since dread (the alarm and fascination) is the inevitable subjective response to confronting the reality of freedom and possibility, the connection between dread and sin is very close. Once the whole process gets under way--movement from innocence, awareness that one has chosen, consciousness of the immense range of choice, alarm and fascination in the face of dizziness, temptation to retreat--then dread about sin itself produces sin. Through this whole process, sin via dread feeds on itself and perpetuates itself.

What is the proper way to end this process? If temptation arises, how is it to be overcome or eliminated? Kierkegaard answers by insisting that the entire process up to the point of temptation in the list above

---

<sup>129</sup>Sickness Unto Death, p. 52.



can not be by-passed. One can not remain in Eden-like innocence. Even the dizziness is unavoidable. But when dizziness comes and the temptation to retreat gnaws, then, he argues, Christian faith teaches one to move through the dizziness, acknowledging the frightening character of our freedom and admitting one's sin.

Dread is then the painful dizziness in the face of the abyss of possibility. Its function in human life is to compel men to accept themselves as responsible, imaginative, creative, and free beings, who can not pretend to live as animals even though they are animals also. Dread is man's uniquely human possession. But it is ambiguous as there is always the temptation to retreat. And in most men there is the yielding to the temptation.

While the normative function in human life that dread is present to perform is constructive, this is very far from saying that dread always, or even very often, appears within a total concrete process that enables the normative function to be performed. More often than not there is retreat from dread, from freedom, from responsibility, and from the acknowledgment of sin. All this is the pathology of dread, as one might say it. But it is emphatically not the fault of dread. To be sure, a retreat will be triggered by the painful dizziness. But it is the person's inability to confront and move through the dizziness that produced the retreat, not the dizziness itself.

From Kierkegaard's point of view, if there were no capacity for dread there would be no capacity for creativity either. This, however, is very different from saying that dread is the basis of creativity or





that there is no creativity without dread. Unless a man could look at freedom, possibility, and his responsibility for choice within them, he could not create in the proper sense of the term. But since looking at freedom always brings the dizziness of dread, in that sense one must move through dread if actual creativity is to take place. The same capacity that makes it possible for man subjectively to feel dizzy before the abyss may, if he moves through it, enable him to be creative. But any statement professing to make dread the necessary cause of or ingredient in creativity would distort Kierkegaard's view.

It would be false to Kierkegaard to say that dread is constructive or to say that it is destructive. The intent of dread is constructive; that is, the purpose for which man possesses the signaling apparatus is constructive. But whether the outcome is constructive or destructive depends upon the response made and executed by the self. If the intensity of the will of a person is such that he is paralyzed or retreats, then what follows is destructive. But it should be understood that then dread has already failed to perform its normative function.

Kierkegaard says that the man who boasts he does not know dread is simply revealing his spiritlessness. He has not yet become a true self. The more spirit the more dread because the more awareness that there is something precious at stake. Without dread, or even with the wish to be without dread, there is no seriousness. Nothing precious is threatened because nothing is precious. Everything is in a state of deadly continuity. Boredom and staleness prevail, and man "even before he is dead. . . can almost take his place in a gallery of wax figures."<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup>Concept of Dread, p. 145.



The chief thing is to let oneself be educated by dread and not be overwhelmed by it, so that dread may lead one to a saving experience by means of faith. Dread is there to remind man what is precious and what is not precious as in Matthew 6 where worrying about food and clothing is compared with seeking the Kingdom of God. Not backward to Eden, but forward to the Kingdom of God, that is the lesson which dread is trying to teach mankind.



## CHAPTER V

### HAS KIERKEGAARD EXAGGERATED THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DREAD?

At the outset of his study of original sin Kierkegaard had insisted that it must take place on the borderline between psychology and theology. Psychology, being an empirical discipline, can not deal with sin. It can only describe dread which makes sin possible though not necessary. But, argued Kierkegaard, dread as described by psychology demands a theological interpretation of man. His capacity for dread is that which keeps man striving to fulfill his destiny before God. He can not remain in a state of innocence for he is created as a free being; and having freedom means freedom of choice. Dread always reminds him of this and spurs him on. If he does not exercise his freedom, he will never become what he was destined to become, but will succumb to what Kierkegaard calls the "dread of the good". If he exercises his freedom of choice he falls prey to sin, which Kierkegaard understands as a separation from God and consequently as a hindrance to truly becoming himself. Thus dread explains how sin gets started in man, but sin as such is posited and not explained.

However, as dread reminds man of his freedom and responsibility, after sin has entered it reminds him also of his imperfect and fallen state until he overcomes dread in the forgiveness offered by God through Christ.

Thus dread is a psychological phenomenon even though it has theological roots. It can be examined by psychology even though not fully





interpreted. In such psychological studies, however, Kierkegaard's view of dread as basically a constructive force has been corroborated. We cite as evidence the views of three modern psychologists.

#### A. Goldstein on Anxiety

The contribution of Goldstein is important here because of the biological framework in which his work was undertaken and because of the parallels in his conclusions to Kierkegaard. His findings arise out of his work as a neurobiologist with diverse mental patients, especially patients with brain injuries.<sup>131</sup> His central thesis is that anxiety is the subjective experience of the organism in a catastrophic condition. An organism is thrown into a catastrophic condition when it can not cope with the demands of its environment and therefore feels a threat to its existence or to values it holds essential for its existence.

Goldstein rejects the view that an organism is to be understood as a composite of various drives. There is only one trend in an organism, namely to actualize its own nature. Each organism displays its primal need to make its environment adequate to itself and vice versa. An inadequate organism (the brain-injured patient) seeks to shrink its world to that in which its essential capacities are adequate, thus avoiding the catastrophic situation. Patients would therefore avoid changes in their environment because they were unable to evaluate new stimuli adequately. The normal adult, of course, is able to cope with a much wider range of stimuli, but the problem remains essentially the same. Human beings vary

---

<sup>131</sup>K. Goldstein, The Organism: A Holistic Approach to Biology.



enormously with respect to their capacity for meeting crisis situations. But nevertheless, every person has his threshold beyond which additional stress makes a situation catastrophic. The function of the various defenses--shown in Goldstein's patients by fanatical orderliness, avoidance of change, and compulsive behavior--is to protect the individual from catastrophic situations.

Furthermore, Goldstein concluded that anxiety is an emotion without a specific object. This can be explained by the fact "that the catastrophic condition involves the impossibility of ordered reactions".<sup>132</sup> It precludes a subject having an object in the outer world. So one can notice in his own experience how anxiety tends to confuse not only his own awareness of himself but at the same time to confuse his perception of the objective situation. Goldstein asserts thus that severe anxiety is experienced by a person as a disintegration of the self, a "dissolution of the existence of his personality".<sup>133</sup>

Again, he sees anxiety as the primal and original reaction and fear as a later development. The distinction of fear and anxiety is made along Kierkegaardian lines. Fear has a specific object, whereas anxiety is a vague and unspecified apprehension. Thus he writes that the first reactions of the infant are diffused and undifferentiated, i.e. anxiety reactions. Fears are a later differentiation as the individual learns to objectivate and to deal specifically with those elements in his environ-

---

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., p. 295.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., p. 295.





ment which might throw him into catastrophic situations. Proceeding to further refine the relation of fear and anxiety, he asks, "What is it then that leads to fear?" And he answers, "Nothing but the experience of the possibility of the onset of anxiety!"<sup>134</sup> Consequently he rejects a widespread procedure of understanding anxiety as a form of fear, or as the highest form of fear. "Thus it becomes clear that anxiety can not be made intelligible from the phenomenon of fear, but that only the opposite procedure is logical".<sup>135</sup>

In regard to the question of the origin of anxiety, he rejects all theories of hereditary anxiety and simply says, "For an explanation of anxiety in childhood it suffices to assume that the organism reacts to inadequate situations with anxiety, and did so in the days of his ancestors, as well as today".<sup>136</sup> The explanation, if nothing else, has the advantage of understanding any futile heredity versus learning discussions.

Perhaps most important, Goldstein also argues for a constructive function of anxiety. He insists that the capacity to bear anxiety is important for the individual's self-realization and for his conquest of his environment. Every person experiences continual shocks and threats to his existence. Indeed, self-actualization occurs only at the price of moving ahead despite such shocks. The freedom of the healthy individual inheres in the fact that he can choose between various alternatives, can

---

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., p. 295.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., p. 300.



avail himself of new possibilities in the overcoming of difficulties in his environment. In moving through rather than away from anxiety the individual not only achieves self-development but also enlarges the scope of his world of activity. "Not to be afraid of dangers which could lead to anxiety--this represents in itself a successful way of coping with anxiety. . ."<sup>137</sup> "Courage, in its final analysis, is nothing but an affirmative answer to the shocks of existence, which must be borne for the actualization of one's own nature".<sup>138</sup> "The more original a human being is, the deeper is his anxiety".<sup>139</sup> Kierkegaard would have had no quarrels with this.

#### B. Sullivan on Anxiety

The concept of anxiety as arising in the locus of interpersonal relations has been most cogently stated by Harry Stack Sullivan.<sup>140</sup> Basic for his theory is the idea of personality as essentially an interpersonal phenomenon, developing out of the relations of the infant with the significant persons in his environment.

He divides the activities of the human organism into two classes. First, there are those activities the aim of which is to gain satisfactions, such as eating, drinking, and sleeping. These satisfactions pertain

---

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., p. 306.

<sup>139</sup>Goldstein, Human Nature in the Light of Psychopathology.

<sup>140</sup>H. S. Sullivan, Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry.



closely to the bodily organization of man. The second class of activities are grouped around the pursuit of security. These pertain more to man's cultural equipment. A central factor in the pursuit of security is the organism's feeling of ability and power. The growth and characteristics of personality depend largely on how this power motive, and the quest for security it entails, are fulfilled in interpersonal relations. In this interpersonal matrix, governed chiefly by the needs of the organism for security and self-expression, anxiety is emerging.

Anxiety, according to Sullivan, arises out of the infant's apprehension of the disapproval of significant persons. It serves to restrain the infant, to restrict his development to those activities of which the significant other persons approve. He presents the significant idea that the self is formed out of the growing need of the infant to deal with anxiety-creating experiences. The self is formed out of the need to distinguish between activities which produce approval and those which result in disapprobation and "comes into being as a dynamism to preserve the feeling of security".<sup>141</sup> Thus the self is a dynamic process by which the organism incorporates those experiences which produce approbation and reward, and learns to exclude those activities which have resulted in disapproval and anxiety. The limitations thus set by early experience tend to be maintained year after year "by our experiencing anxiety when we tend to overstep the margin".<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p. 10.





Now these limitations set by anxiety-creating experiences are not merely prohibitions of action but are limitations of awareness as well. Whatever tendencies would arouse anxiety tend to be excluded from awareness, or, in Sullivan's term, dissociated. He states,

The self comes to control awareness, to restrict one's consciousness of what is going on in one's situation very largely by the instrumentality of anxiety with, as a result, a dissociation from personal awareness of those tendencies of the personality which are not included or incorporated in the approved structure of the self.<sup>143</sup>

The self-dynamism, as Sullivan calls it, develops as a process by which the anxiety-creating experiences are excluded from activity and awareness and the approved activities are incorporated into the child's awareness and behavior. In this sense, the self comes into being to preserve the individual's security, to protect him from anxiety. This view emphasizes the negative function of anxiety in the development of the self and illuminates the very common phenomenon that anxiety experiences which are dealt with unconstructively lead to a constriction of the self. Sullivan, however, also recognizes the constructive use of anxiety. Areas in the personality marked by anxiety become areas of significant growth when, as in psychotherapy or favorable human relationships, the individual can deal with his anxiety constructively.

### C. Fromm on Anxiety

The general importance of cultural factors in an individual's anxiety is now widely recognized. Sources of an individual's anxiety are

---

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-22.



conditioned by the standards and values of his culture. And, furthermore, quantities of his anxiety are correlated to the unity and stability or the lack of them in his culture.

Those who have attempted to investigate the cultural factors that may be anxiety-producing have insisted that there is reason to assume that individual competitive success is both the dominant goal in our Western culture and the most pervasive occasion for anxiety.

Of particular interest here is the work of Erich Fromm who undertook to trace the historical genesis and development of the value of individual competitive success and the anxiety it evoked.

Fromm's central concern is with the isolation of modern man which has accompanied the individual freedom emerging at the Renaissance.<sup>144</sup> His discussion is particularly cogent in respect to the interrelationship of this isolation with economic developments. He shows that "certain factors in the modern industrial system in general and its monopolistic phase in particular make for a development of a personality which feels powerless and alone, anxious and insecure."<sup>145</sup> It is self-evident that the experience of isolation is first cousin to anxiety. The human being develops as an individual in a social matrix; hence the problem Fromm attacks is how the individual with his freedom is able or unable to relate himself to his interpersonal world. It is significant that Fromm is like Kierkegaard in the previous century in that both see the problem of anxiety in terms of individuality, freedom, and isolation.

---

<sup>144</sup>E. Fromm, Escape from Freedom.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., p. 240.





Beginning a brief exposition of Fromm's thought, it is necessary to take note of his dialectical concept of freedom. Freedom always has two aspects: in its negative aspect it is freedom "from" restraints and authority, but in its positive aspect it always involves the question of whether this freedom will be used "for" new relatedness. Mere negative freedom results in the isolation of the individual.

This dialectical nature of freedom can be traced in the emerging of the individual child as well as in the character formation of a whole culture.

The child begins life bound to parents by "primary ties". His growth involves an increasing freedom from dependence on parents. This process is referred to as individuation. It brings with it potential and actual threats as it involves a progressive breaking of the original unity of the primary ties. The child becomes aware of being a separate entity and of being alone.

This separation from a world which in comparison with one's own individual existence is overwhelmingly strong and powerful, and often threatening and dangerous, creates a feeling of powerlessness and anxiety. As long as one was an integral part of that world, unaware of the possibilities and responsibilities of individual action, one did not need to be afraid of it.<sup>146</sup>

This sense of isolation and concomitant anxiety can not be tolerated indefinitely. Ideally, one expects the child to develop new and positive relatedness on the basis of his growing strength as an individual. But the problem is never solved ideally or simply. Individual freedom involves

---

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., p. 29.



a persistent dialectic at every point of growth. How the issue is met, whether by positive relatedness on one hand or by surrendering freedom in order to avoid isolation and anxiety on the other hand or by the compromise solutions (the neurotic patterns), will be decisive for the development of the personality.

The same dialectic can be observed on the cultural level. The emergence of individuality at the Renaissance brought freedom from medieval authority and regulation. However, at the same time it meant a severing of those ties which had afforded security and a sense of belonging. This severance, in Fromm's words, was "bound to create a deep feeling of insecurity, powerlessness, doubt, aloneness and anxiety".<sup>147</sup>

The freedom from medieval restraints in the economic area, evident in the freeing of the markets from guild regulation and the lifting of the proscriptions on usury and the accumulation of wealth, was both an expression of the new individualism and a powerful incentive for it. One could now devote oneself to economic aggrandizement to the extent of one's abilities and good luck. But with this newly won freedom went increasing tendencies toward individual isolation and subjection to new powers. The individual is now

threatened by powerful suprapersonal forces, capital and the market. His relationship to his fellow-men, with everyone as a potential competitor, has become hostile and estranged; he is free--that is alone, isolated, threatened from all sides.<sup>148</sup>

---

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., p. 62.



One means of allaying anxiety is frantic activity. The anxiety arising out of the dilemma of powerlessness in the face of suprapersonal economic forces on one hand, but theoretical belief in the efficacy of individual effort on the other, was symptomized partly by excessive activism. Fromm points out that the great emphasis in the sixteenth and subsequent centuries on work has as one of its psychodynamics the allaying of anxiety. Work became a virtue in itself, quite apart from the creative and social values emerging from it. "The drive for relentless work was one of the fundamental productive forces, no less important for the development of our industrial system than steam and electricity."<sup>149</sup>

The consequences of these developments had a profound influence on the character structure of Western man. Since the values of the market were the highest criteria, persons also became valued as commodities which could be bought and sold. A person's worth is then his market value, whether it is skill or personality that is up for sale. This commercial valuation, or perhaps more accurately, devaluation of persons has been vividly characterized by W. H. Auden in his poem, "The Age of Anxiety". When a young man in that poem wonders whether he can find a useful vocation, another answers:

. . . Well, you will soon  
Not bother but acknowledge yourself  
As market-made, a commodity  
Whose value varies, a vendor who has  
To obey his buyer. . .<sup>150</sup>

---

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>150</sup>W. H. Auden, The Age of Anxiety, p. 42.





Thus contemporary economic processes have contributed not only to an alienation of man from man but also to a self-alienation as the individual's valuation of himself is largely a reflection of what others think of his value on the market. Feelings of isolation and anxiety consequently occur not only because the individual is set in competition with his fellow men, but also because he is thrown into conflict about his inner valuation of himself. Fromm summarizes this point as follows:

Since modern man experiences himself both as the seller and as the commodity to be sold on the market, his self-esteem depends on conditions beyond his control. If he is "successful", he is valuable; if he is not, he is worthless. The degree of insecurity which results from this orientation can hardly be overestimated. If one feels that one's own value is not constituted primarily by the human qualities one possesses, but by one's success on a competitive market with ever-changing conditions, one's self-esteem is bound to be shaky and in constant need of confirmation by others.<sup>151</sup>

In such a situation one is driven to strive relentlessly for success. This is the chief way to validate one's self and to allay anxiety. And any failure in the competitive struggle is a threat to the quasi-esteem for one's self, which, quasi though it be, is all one has in such a situation.

It is to be expected that certain "mechanisms of escape" should emerge from the situation where isolation and anxiety are prevalent. The mechanism most frequently employed in our culture, Fromm submits, is that of "automaton conformity". An individual "adopts entirely the kind of personality offered to him by cultural patterns; and he thereby becomes exactly as all the others are and as they expect him to be".<sup>152</sup> This

---

<sup>151</sup>Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 72.

<sup>152</sup>Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 185.



conformity proceeds on the assumption that the "person who gives up his individual self and becomes an automaton, identical with millions of other automatons around him, need not feel alone and anxious any more."<sup>153</sup>

Such conformity can be understood again in terms of Fromm's idea of the dialectical nature of freedom. There has been much progress in our culture in regard to the negative aspect of freedom, i.e. the freedom from outward authority over individual belief, faith, and opinion. But this has resulted to a great extent in a psychological and spiritual vacuum. Since the isolation involved in mere freedom from authority can not be long maintained, there develop new substitutes for the rejected authority, which Fromm terms the "anonymous authorities" like public opinion and common sense. For example, one phase of modern freedom has been the right of each individual to worship as he chooses. But, adds Fromm,

we do not sufficiently recognize that while it is a victory against those powers of Church and State which did not allow man to worship according to his own conscience, the modern individual has lost to a great extent the inner capacity to have faith in anything which is not provable by the methods of the natural sciences.<sup>154</sup>

The inner restraints, compulsions, and fears which tend to fill the vacuum created by mere negative freedom provide strong motivations for automaton conformity. Though this conformity is acquired by the individual as a means of avoiding isolation and anxiety, it actually works the other way. The individual conforms at the price of renouncing

---

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., p. 105.





his autonomous strength, and hence he becomes more helpless, powerless, and insecure.

Other mechanisms of escape from individual isolation which Fromm describes are sado-masochism and destructiveness. Though sadism and masochism may have as one of their expressions the desire to inflict pain or have pain inflicted on one's self, they are more basically forms of symbiosis in which an individual endeavors to overcome isolation by becoming absorbed in the existence of other persons. "The different forms which the masochistic strivings assume have one aim: to get rid of the individual self, to lose one's self; in other words, to get rid of the burden of freedom".<sup>155</sup> Destructiveness, in Fromm's opinion, (as perhaps evidenced in the racial struggles in U.S. cities) is likewise related to the need to escape from unbearable feelings of powerlessness and isolation. The rationale for this can be seen in the relation of anxiety to hostility. Anxiety creates hostility and destructiveness is one of the overt forms this hostility assumes.

#### D. The Age of Anxiety

Not only have psychological studies corroborated Kierkegaard's study of dread but in view of Kierkegaard's elucidation of the phenomenon of dread, it can not any longer appear as an accident that the present age, which produced the most sudden and astounding proliferation of knowledge in the entire history of the human race, came in due course of time

---

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., p. 152.



to think of itself as the "Age of Anxiety". For knowledge multiplies possibility, and possibility, the "being able" of man, produces the dizziness of freedom which is the structural anxiety of the human mode of existence. This is vividly illustrated by a conversation which Bishop Newbigin had with a member of the team of physicists who worked on the first atomic bomb during the final phase of the last world war.<sup>156</sup> The scientist described what it felt like to work on the job with his colleagues as the moment of success came nearer and nearer. And then he described the sudden change of feeling which came over the whole team when they realized that they had succeeded, and that the thing they had created was potentially the most monstrous evil that the mind of man had ever conceived. The nature of their work imposed absolute secrecy. They were precluded from sharing their sense of guilt and anxiety with any one outside. Having never given much sustained attention to questions of ethics, they now formed a number of study groups, probing every aspect of their problem. Finally they wrote to President Truman urging that the bombs should be used on some uninhabited area after due warning and not in any case on a city. Their letter was never even answered and they had to see the instrument they had created used to create the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They found that at the moment of their apparent triumph they were thrown into the anguish of their guilt.

This phenomenon of knowledge also illustrates the incremental character of anxiety in history. Awareness of anxiety increases in the

---

<sup>156</sup>L. Newbigin, Honest Religion for Secular Man, pp. 30-31.





course of history not only because man continually places more and more knowledge between himself and the Eden-like ignorance which alone could eradicate his anxiety, but also because his own history shows him and will not let him forget his actual misuses of possibilities in the past, their continuing consequences in the present, and the pall of dread they cast over the future. Whereas at the beginning of the modern age each new advance in knowledge, especially in knowledge leading to the "control" of nature, was hailed as a triumph of the human spirit and a promise of deliverance from nature's dangers, now, after the history of two scientific wars and the permanent threat of scientific annihilation, the question "What will they think of next?" is no longer asked in curiosity or pride, but anxiously, in an ambivalence of hope and horror. And, not unexpectedly, there is also a tendency to put the blame for this anxiety on knowledge itself--all that knowledge lying around in heaps, like unguarded storage dumps of dynamite!

But it is not only anxiety before the threat of possible annihilation that is increased by the many new possibilities opened up by increased knowledge. There are, after all, many good and constructive possibilities inherent in knowledge also. Yet, it is the failure to use these good possibilities to anything like their full extent that produces another kind of anxiety with every increase of knowledge, the anxiety of becoming guilty by doing nothing. To the mind of the ethical individual, knowledge, simply as knowledge, increases responsibility and therefore culpability. One needs only to think of the situation in medicine, for example the discovery of the polio vaccine, to see how new knowledge





creates culpability where there was none before. Before the vaccine was available, when any one contracted this disease it was like being struck by lightning--what could be done? Now that the vaccine is here, an element of negligence enters the picture, and with it comes the anxiety of the uneasy conscience which only the stupid can escape and the callous shrug off. And this is true of all the good possibilities of knowledge that remain unused--at least it is true for the ethical individual, who is aware that the good demands to be done and that the individual can not be related to the good except as he produces it in action. And now that, thanks to the knowledge of communication, all problems present themselves on a world-wide scale--the news services pouring out their continuous stream of disasters, continually reminding one of the disparity between knowledge available and its unused good possibilities (for instance, starvation, when knowledge for both food production and population limitation is available)--it is small wonder that a kind of diffuse anxiety of the guilty conscience adds itself continually to the increment of anxiety about imminent destruction.

And then there is also the question of meaning for the intellectual, the fact that the sudden increase in knowledge does not simplify but instead aggravates the problem of finding meaning in the totality. Thus modern man, and the modern intellectual in particular, actually suffer from too much knowledge. The sudden avalanche of scientific knowledge refuses to fall into any simple pattern that spells out an obvious meaning for man, and though this fact may profitably turn him toward himself for finding the meaning of life, it nevertheless acts as



an obtrusive presence, one more among the difficulties and complexities of existence that arouse in him the anxiety about chaos as the threat of ultimate meaninglessness. The multiversity of this world does not strike the man in a state of ignorance, for instance, the young person and the primitive or simple adult, as chaos but as mystery, arousing fear and wonder and perhaps the confidence that more knowledge would dispel the mystery. But when there is all this knowledge, and still the mystery refuses to yield up its secret, then there is the threat of ultimate chaos, which arouses dread or anxiety.

So modern man has discovered the hard way, historically, that the increase of knowledge brings with it the increased consciousness of anxiety, and now the question is what to do about it. Certainly if man were not destined to become spirit and if anxiety were just an unpleasant feeling one should try to get rid of, the obvious solution would be: back to Eden! Back to the blissful ignorance of innocence, the joyful absence of accountability that even now exonerates children, back to the South Sea islands where striving is unknown, anxiety is minimal, and where anthropologists can find hardly a handful of neurotics! And this solution is being tried, in more ways than the tourist traffic shows. The catalogue of neo-primitivisms in all parts of our culture bears witness not only to their proponents' disgust with overrefinement and sophistication, but also to the longing for primal innocence, carelessness, spontaneity, rapport with nature, childlikeness, and other nostalgically idealized preanxiety states made possible by ignorance.

However, if back-to-Eden is not a very practical solution in the





midst of a technological civilization that few will give up, there are other ways in which modern man is trying to reduce the all-pervasive increase of palpable anxiety. There is the solution of pinning the blame on freedom, or at least on too much freedom, and then of reducing anxiety by voluntarily relinquishing sizable portions of freedom to authority, an option that has been carefully analyzed by Erich Fromm in his Escape From Freedom. But whoever forfeits freedom forfeits his selfhood, and by allowing others to make his decisions for him he exchanges the anxiety of freedom for the despair of not having a self, a solution that would occur to man only when his dehumanization or loss of spirit had reached the point where not having a self was considered a small loss.

Then there is the solution that proposes to reduce anxiety by means of the cultivation of the fine arts. Art gives to one at least premonitions, glimpses, intimations of order, which have the effect of tranquilizing the soul. Why not use the products of the creative imagination to reduce the anxiety of meaninglessness? Unfortunately, art takes a sly and terrible revenge on those who try to use it in this way. For if the artist in his own life experiences the anxiety of meaninglessness and if he does not wish to become a refined charlatan, he finds himself cornered by the paradoxical task of inventing new forms not to make order out of chaos, but to express chaos, and his products therefore evoke the anxiety of chaos far more vividly and stirringly than any scientific treatise on the subject.

Finally, there are the ways of attacking anxiety pragmatically and scientifically as a problem to be solved. These range all the way from pills and nerve-operations, alcohol and entertainment, through the



tranquilizing use of religion, to psychotherapy proper, all under the assumption that anxiety must be "reduced" by whatever means can be found. Yet if anxiety is the necessary though painful condition for the development of the spirit in the individual, only neurotic anxiety should be reduced, and then not because it is anxiety, but because it is an unrealistic, twisted, unprofitable anxiety which debilitates the individual instead of helping him by showing him where the real dangers lie. Only those psychotherapists who are aware of the function of "normal" anxiety in the individuals "becoming", that is, his growth in selfhood, also perceive the possible dangers in the many-sided contemporary efforts to reduce anxiety. For example, Rollo May, a therapist who uses both Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety and modern existential analysis to extend the scope of psychoanalytic theory and practice, has this to say about the curious need sometimes to arouse anxiety in the patient in order to get him to take himself seriously:

The therapist is doing the patient a disservice if he takes away from him the realization that it is entirely within the realm of possibility that he forfeit or lose his existence and that may well be precisely what he is doing at this very moment. This point is especially important because patients tend to carry a never-quite-articulated belief, no doubt connected with childhood omnipotent beliefs associated with parents, that somehow the therapist will see that nothing harmful happens to them; and therefore they don't need to take their own existence seriously. The tendency prevails in much therapy to water down anxiety, despair, and the tragic aspects of life. Is it not true as general principle that we need to engender anxiety only to the extent that we already have watered it down? Life itself produces enough, and the only real crisis; and it is very much to the credit of the existential emphasis in therapy that it confronts these tragic realities directly.<sup>157</sup>

---

<sup>157</sup>R. May, E. Angel, H. F. Ellenberger (eds.), Existence, A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology.



Thus Kierkegaard's assertion that an understanding of dread is basic in any interpretation of human nature has been underscored by the emergence of anxiety as a nodal problem in our time. Explorations and investigations in such diverse disciplines as psychology, sociology, biology, philosophy, and poetry were converging on it. A number of important insights have been gained by studies of cultural and historical as well as biological and psychological dimensions.

Kierkegaard was certainly not unaware of the many perspectives from which anxiety could be approached. Indeed, in his aesthetical writings he makes explorations of his own. But most basically anxiety or dread is a theological problem for him. This is why it became so crucial for his task of showing what it means to live before God as an individual.

In conclusion, following Kierkegaard's insight, we shall attempt a theological interpretation of the phenomenon of anxiety.





## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Kierkegaard had asserted that dread or anxiety is basic to human nature and that man could not be understood unless one took account of it. This was echoed later in Heidegger's contention, stated in Sein und Zeit, that anxiety provides perhaps the best mirror in which to see human nature. If then dread or anxiety is so crucial, what does it tell us about human nature. From previous considerations in this paper there arise two fundamental perspectives from which anxiety can be viewed, two perspectives which can perhaps be united into a single theory.

Anxiety can be viewed from the clinical perspective. Seen in this context it appears to be disteleological, a hindrance to a useful and happy life. Rather than preparing the individual for fight or flight, it seems to simply disorient him. This is the neurotic anxiety.

It can also be viewed from the pedagogical perspective where anxiety is considered primarily as a constructive force. It does not mean that the dreadful and neurotic aspects are brushed aside. But it is insisted that anxiety if encountered correctly leads an individual to become himself before God.

It is submitted here that the second perspective is the more inclusive one and that the many cases of neurotic anxiety are really only special cases of the more basic phenomenon. Furthermore, it is also submitted that anxiety or dread is fundamentally a creative element in man's life. This does not mean that neurotic anxiety can in practical



cases always be reversed into constructive anxiety. By analogy, we can not explain sexual perversion without reference to a normal development of sexual life. Nevertheless, when we come to particular cases, it is unlikely that perversion can be overcome. Yet, even the anxiety of the pervert about his perversion witnesses that normal impulses are still struggling to emerge. Thus even the fact that we tend to concentrate on neurotic aspects of anxiety, should not lead us to deny that anxiety has a more fundamental role in the totality of man's life.

That dread or anxiety is an awareness of a threat to something highly valued by the individual, whether it be security or social approval, is a thought which meets agreement of all those whom we have considered on the subject.

Following this thought, the fundamental role of anxiety can perhaps be made explicit by understanding it as a painful awareness of a separation from a loved object which can only be overcome by bridging the separation.

Reference was made above to Heidegger's view of anxiety as a mirror to human nature. How then would the suggestion of understanding anxiety as basically a constructive force affect one's view of man? The answer can be provided in terms of the ancient theological doctrine of the image of God.

All Christian theologians have taught that man is created in the image of God, probably because it could not be avoided since it is said in the Genesis account. But at this point the agreement ends already. Roman Catholic theologians expounded with great logical force that the image of God was not lost with man's fall into sin. Since the image





is of the essence of man's creation, if it were lost, man after the fall would be a different species. In that case it would be unjust for later generations to suffer for the sin of Adam. Nor could man as we know him historically be saved. He would have to be changed back into a different species. And now we are faced with a sufficient number of insoluble problems.

Reformed theologians have insisted with equally great logical force that the image of God was in effect lost in the fall into sin. Of course, they had to hedge against saying it was utterly lost. Thus clever distinctions had to be made. They said that the substance of the image remained while the attributes were lost. Or they maintained that even so the image of God remained, it was totally ineffectual. They said that if the image remained in any vital sense, man would tend to seek God. But if that is so, why the sacrifice of Christ? Only the notion of the radical corruption of the image of God makes it possible to take sin seriously enough. Luther puts it into the following words:

The scholastic statement that "the natural powers are unimpaired" is a horrible blasphemy. . . . If the natural powers are unimpaired, what need is there of Christ? If by nature man has good will; if he has true understanding to which, as they say, the will can naturally conform itself; what is it, then, that was lost in Paradise through sin and that had to be restored through the Son of God alone.<sup>218</sup>

These dilemmas can perhaps be mitigated if we take a dynamic rather than a static and substantive view of the image of God in man. Let us think of it not as an entity or substance which may or may not be lost.

---

<sup>218</sup>Martin Luther, "Selected Psalms", Luther's Works, Vol. 13.



Let us think of it as a capacity to love, after the image and likeness of God's love. Again, taught by dynamic psychology, we must not understand this capacity as being mature in the heart of a child, but rather as an end-point toward which man can strive. This is the story and destiny of every man. It is the story of the perils and possibilities of love, of the creativity and anxiety of beings to whom fulfillment in love is the highest blessing, and separation from love the greatest punishment.

It is then contended that anxiety is an indication of the fact that by the fall man's capacity for love of God and others has been distorted. In anxiety we can see the struggles of a free being trying to overcome this separation. But as long as anxiety is alive, it testifies to the struggle, to the fact that love may be beleaguered but is not lost. We all know, partly because of the work of psychiatrists and psychologists, that the course of love does not run smoothly. There are the days of innocence and ignorance when the urge of love runs strong, but the fear of the unknown also looms. Then one is tempted to grasp at finiteness, to stop the developmental growth at some particular point where security seems to beckon. There are the days of self-reproach, when one feels unworthy of the love of others. Then one is tempted to devise a rite of purification or to stop trying, so that one can not be blamed for his unworthiness. And even in our relative maturity, when we have found the loved one who returns our love, we are beset by fears that we are not worthy or that we may lose our beloved.

The changes that we are called upon to take a creative part in bringing about, so that we may at last realize the image of God, are fearful to finite and fragile beings. All of us at one time or another





compromise our destiny. The anxiety that we experience not only tempts us to the compromise; it comes back upon us after the compromise, in a different form, to prove that our longing to become what we were meant to be is not dead. This anxiety of guilt, so long as we do not still it by narcotics or overly severe self-limitations, drives us to seek a cure, to resume our quest for the image of God.

The Reformed theologians were fearful of admitting that the image of God retained any vitality in fallen man, lest the sacrificial love of Christ become superfluous. But when we think of the image of God in man as the capacity to love, we can admit its vitality and still understand quite clearly the need for help from beyond our own powers. The course of love does not run smoothly. In every human being progress toward mature love which freely gives to the beloved is blocked in many ways and with varying degrees of severity. When blockage does occur, help is needed, a help that consists of understanding, forgiving, accepting love. The one who suffers needs to feel this love and acceptance. He can not give it to himself, for this is exactly his problem that he feels unworthy and therefore accuses himself. He must experience the love from another.

And now an old theological word comes into focus: the sufferer experiences this love as "grace", as a gift freely given though undeserved. Only when grace has opened the way can the sufferer begin to realize the truth that if this other one loves me, there must be something about me that is worthy after all.

Anxiety is dreadful, but it is a sign of life. It accompanies us on our life's journey. And though we be tempted to flee from it, it





has a way of returning to haunt us, to remind us that no compromise with our fundamental destiny can give us rest, that only in the realization of the Divine Image which is Divine Love, can we find true or lasting fulfillment, can we find love which casts out fear.

But all this is in a sense implied already in Augustine's famous prayer: "Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee".



## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### A. PRIMARY SOURCES

#### 1. Kierkegaard's Works

Kierkegaard, Soren. Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941.

\_\_\_\_\_. Either/Or. 2 Vols. New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc. 1959.

\_\_\_\_\_. Fear and Trembling. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941.

\_\_\_\_\_. On Authority and Revelation. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955.

\_\_\_\_\_. Philosophical Fragments. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962.

\_\_\_\_\_. Stages On Life's Way. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Concept of Dread. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Point of View for My Work as An Author. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Sickness unto Death. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941.

#### 2. Selections and Anthologies

Dru, Alexander (ed. and trans.). The Journals of Kierkegaard. New York: Oxford University Press, 1938.

\_\_\_\_\_. (ed. and trans.). The Present Age and Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962.

Lowrie, Walter (ed. and trans.). For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves! Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.

\_\_\_\_\_. (ed. and trans.). Kierkegaard's Attack Upon "Christendom". Boston: Beacon Press, 1966.





## B. SECONDARY SOURCES

### 1. Kierkegaard Interpretations

Brandt, Frithiof. Soren Kierkegaard.

Collins, James. The Mind of Kierkegaard. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1965.

Diem, Hermann. Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Existence. London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959.

Friemond, H. Existenz in Liebe nach Soren Kierkegaard. Salzburg: Anton Pustet, 1965.

Geismar, Edward. Lectures on the Religious Thought of Soren Kierkegaard. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1938.

Johnson, H.A. and Thulstrup, N. (eds.). A Kierkegaard Critique. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1962.

Jolivet, Regis. Introduction to Kierkegaard. London: Frederick Muller, 1950.

Lowrie, Walter. A Short Life of Kierkegaard. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1942.

Patrick, D. Pascal and Kierkegaard. 2 vols. London: Lutterworth Press, 1947.

Price, George. The Narrow Pass. London: Hutchinson of London, 1963.

Swenson, David. Something About Kierkegaard. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1945.

Thomte, Reidar. Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948.

Tielsch, Elfriede. Kierkegaard's Glaube. Goettingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1964.



## 2. Background Material

Hegel, G. W. F. The Logic of Hegel. (Wallace, trans.). First edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1873.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Phenomenology of Mind. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1967.

Kant, Immanuel. Critique of Pure Reason. (Kemp Smith trans.). London: Macmillan and Company, Limited, 1963.

Kirk, G. S. and J. E. Raven. The Presocratic Philosophers. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1966.

Luther, Martin. "Selected Psalms", Luther's Works. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955, Vol. XIII.

## 3. Psychological Studies

Freud, Sigmund. The Problem of Anxiety. (H. A. Bunker, trans.). New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1963.

Fromm, Erich. Escape from Freedom. New York: Rinehart and Company, Incorporated, 1941.

\_\_\_\_\_. Man for Himself. New York: Rinehart and Company, Incorporated, 1947.

Goldstein, Kurt. The Organism, A Holistic Approach to Biology. New York: American Book Company, 1939.

\_\_\_\_\_. Human Nature in the Light of Psychopathology. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1940.

May, Rollo. The Meaning of Anxiety. New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1950.

Hiltner, Seward and Karl Menninger. Constructive Aspects of Anxiety. New York: Abingdon Press, 1963.

Sullivan, Harry Stack. Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry. Washington, D.C.: William Alanson White Psychiatric Foundation, 1947.



#### 4. General Reading

Barrett, William. Irrational Man. New York: Doubleday and Company, Incorporated, 1962.

Jaspers, Karl. Man in the Modern Age. New York: Doubleday and Company, Incorporated, 1957.

Kaufmann, Walter. (ed.). Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre. New York: Meridian Books, 1956.

King, Magda. Heidegger's Philosophy. New York: Dell Publishing Company, Incorporated, 1964.

Lowith, Karl. From Hegel to Nietzsche. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964.

Reinhardt, Kurt F. The Existentialist Revolt. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1960.

Roberts, David E. Psychotherapy and a Christian View of Man. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950.

\_\_\_\_\_. (R. Hazelton, ed.). Existentialism and Religious Belief. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.

Roubiczek, Paul. Existentialism For and Against. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1964.

Tillich, Paul. The Courage To Be. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952.

Wild, John. The Challenge of Existentialism. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955.







**B29908**